SHEILA

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A STORY OF CAPE COD

BY

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AUTHOR OF "TOBIAS O' THE LIGHT," "CAP'N JONAH'S FORTUNE," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

CAP'N IRA AND PRUE

SEATED on this sunshiny morning in his old arm-chair of bent hickory, between his knees a cane on the head of which his gnarled hands rested, Captain Ira Ball was the true retired mariner of the old school. His ruddy face was freshly shaven, his scant, silvery hair well smoothed; everything was neat and trig about him, including his glazed, narrow-brimmed hat, his blue pilot-cloth coat, pleated shirt front as white as snow, heavy silver watch chain festooned upon his waist-coat, and blue-yarn socks showing between the bottom of his full, gray trouser legs and his well-blacked low shoes.

For Cap'n Ira had commanded passenger-carrying craft in his day, and was a bit of a dandy still. The niceties of maritime full dress were as important to his mind now that he had retired from the sea to spend his remaining days in the Ball homestead on Wreckers' Head as when he had trod the

quarter-deck of the old *Susan Gatskill,* or had occupied the chief seat at her saloon table.

"I don't know what's to become of us," repeated Cap'n Ira, wagging a thoughtful head, his gaze, as that of old people often is, fixed upon a point too distant for youthful eyes to see.

"I can't see into the future, Ira, any clearer than you can," rejoined his wife, glancing at his sagging, blue-coated shoulders with some gentle apprehension.

She was a frail, little, old woman, one of those women who, after a robust middle age, seem gradually to shrivel to the figure of what they were in their youth, but with no charm of girlish lines remaining. Her face was wrinkled like a russet apple in February, and it had the colorings of that grateful fruit. She sat on the stone slab which served for a back door stoop peeling potatoes.

"I swan, Prue, you cut me in two places this mornin' when you shaved me," said Cap'n Ira suddenly and in some slight exasperation. "And I can't handle that dratted razor myself."

"Maybe you could get John-Ed Williams to come over and shave you, Ira."

"John-Ed's got his work to do. Then again, how're we going to pay him for such jobs? I swan! I can't afford a vally, Prue. Besides, you need help about the house more than I need a steward. I can get along without being shaved so frequent, I s'pose,

but there's times when you can't scurce lift a pot of potatoes off the stove."

"Oh, now, Ira, I ain't so bad as all that!" declared his wife mildly.

"Yes, you be. I am always expecting you to fall down, or hurt yourself some way. And as for looking out for the Queen of Sheby——"

"Now, Ira, Queenie ain't no trouble scurcely."

"Huh! She's more trouble than all our money, that's sure. And she's eating her head off."

"Now, don't say that," urged his wife in that soothing tone which often irritated Cap'n Ira more than it mollified him.

He tapped the metal top of the huge knob of his cane and the spring cover flew open. Ira took a pinch of snuff, inhaled it, closed the cover of the box, delicately brushed a few flecks of the pungent powder from his coat lapel and shirt front, and then, burying his nose in a large silk handkerchief, vented a prodigious:

"A-choon!"

Prudence uttered a surprised squeak, like a mouse being stepped on, jerked herself to a half-standing posture, and the potatoes rolled to every point of the compass.

"Goodness gracious gallop!" she ejaculated, quite shaken out of her usual calm. "I should think, Ira, as many times as I've told you that scares me most into a conniption, that you'd signal me when you're

going to take snuff. I—I'm all of a shake, I be."

"I swan! I'm sorry, Prue. I oughter fire a gun, I allow, before speakin' the ship."

"Fire a gun!" repeated the old woman, panting as she scrambled for the potatoes. "That's what I object to, Ira. You want to speak *this* ship 'fore you shoot that awful noise. I never can get used to it."

"There, there!" he said, trying to poke the more distant potatoes toward her with his cane. He could not himself stoop; or, if he did, he could only sit erect again after the method of a ratchet wheel. "I won't do so again, Prudence. I be an onthoughtful critter, if ever there was one."

Prudence had recovered the last potato. She stopped to pat his ruddy cheek, nor was it much wrinkled, before she returned to peeling the potatoes.

"I know you don't mean to, Iry," she crooned. Married couples like the Balls, where the man has been at home only for brief visits between voyages, if they really love each other, never grow weary of the little frills on connubial bliss usually worn shabby by other people before the honeymoon is past. "I know you don't mean to. But when you sneeze I think it's the crack o' doom."

"I'm sorry about them potatoes," repeated Cap'n Ira. "I make you a lot of extry work, Prue. Sometimes I feel, fixed as I be in health, I oughter be

in the Sailors' Snug Harbor over to Paulmouth. I do, for a fact."

"And what would become of me?" cried the old woman, appalled.

"Well," returned Cap'n Ira, "you couldn't be no worse off than you be. We'd miss each other a heap, I know."

"Ira!" cried his wife. "Ira, I'd just *die* without you now that I've got you to myself at last. Those long years you were away so much, and us not being blessed with children——"

Ira Ball made a sudden clucking sound with his tongue. That was a sore topic of conversation, and he always tried to dodge it.

"It did seem sometimes," pursued Prudence, wiping her eyes with a bit of a handkerchief that she took from her bosom, "as though I wasn't an honestly married woman. I know that sounds awful" —and she shook her head—"but it was so, you only getting home as you did between voyages. But I was always looking forward to the time when you would be home for good."

"Don't you s'pose I looked forward to casting anchor?" he demanded warmly. "Seemed like the time never would come. I was always trying to speculate a little so as to make something besides my skipper's pay and share. That—that's why I got bit in that Sea-Gold proposition. That feller's prospectus did read mighty reasonable, Prudence."

"I know it did, Ira," she agreed cordially. "I believed in it just as strong as you did. You warn't none to blame."

"Well, I dunno. It's mighty nice of you to say so, Prue. But they told me afterward that I might have knowed that a feller couldn't extract ten dollars' wuth of gold from the whole Atlantic Ocean, not if he bailed it dry!"

"We've got enough left to keep us, Ira."

"Just about. Just about. That is just it. When I was taken down with this rheumatiz and the hospital doctors in New York told me I could never think of pacing my own quarter no more, we had just enough left invested in good securities for us to live on the int'rest."

"And the old place, here, Ira," added his wife cheerfully.

"Which ain't much more than a shelter," he rejoined rather bitterly. "And just as I say, it isn't fit for two old folks like us to live alone in. Why, we can't even raise our own potatoes no more. And I never yet heard of pollack swimmin' ashore and begging to be split and dried against winter. No, sir!"

"The Lord's been good to us, Ira. We ain't never suffered yet," she told him softly.

"I know that. We ain't suffering for food and shelter. But, I swan, Prue, we be suffering for some young person about the house. Now, hold

on! 'Twarn't for us to have children. That warn't meant. We've been all through that, and it's settled. But that don't change the fact that we need somebody to live with us if we're going to live comfortable."

"Oh, dear, if my niece Sarah had lived! She used to stay with me when she was a gal and you was away," sighed Prudence.

"But she married and had a gal of her own. She brought her here that time I was home after my first v'y'ge on the *Susan Gatskill.* A pretty baby if ever there was one."

"Ida May Bostwick! Bostwick was Sarah's married name. I heard something about Ida May only the other day."

"You did?" exclaimed Cap'n Ira, much interested.

"Yes, Ira. Annabell Coffin, she who was a Cuttle, was visiting his folks in Boston, and she learned that Sarah Bostwick's daughter was working behind the counter in some store there. She has to work for her livin', poor child."

"I swan!" ejaculated the captain.

Much as he had been about the world, Cap'n Ira looked upon most mundane affairs with the eyes of the true Cape man. Independence is bred in the bone of his tribe. A tradesman or storekeeper is, after all, not of the shipmaster caste. And a clerk, working "behind the counter" of any store, is much like a man before the mast.

"It does seem too bad," sighed Prudence. "She was a pretty baby, as you say, Ira."

"Sarah was nice as she could be to you," was the old man's thoughtful comment.

"Yes. But her husband, Bostwick, was only a mechanic. Of course, he left nothing. Them city folks are so improvident," said Prudence. "I wish't we was able to do something for little Ida May, Ira. Think of her workin' behind a counter!"

"I am a-thinkin'," growled the old captain. "See here, Prue. What's to hinder us doin' something for her?"

Prudence looked at him, startled.

"Why, Iry, you say yourself we can scurce help ourselves."

"It's a mighty ill wind that don't blow fair for some craft," declared the ancient mariner, nodding. "We do need help right here, Prudence, and that gal of Sarah Bostwick's could certainly fill the bill. On the other hand, she'd be a sight better off here on the Cape, living with us, getting rosy and healthy, and having this old place and what we've got left when we die, than she would be slavin' behind a counter in any city store. What d'you think?"

"Ira!" exclaimed his wife, clasping her hands, potato knife and all. "Ira! I think that's a most wonderful idea. It takes you to think up things. You're just wonderful!"

Cap'n Ira preened himself like the proud old

gander he was. He heaved himself out of the chair by the aid of his cane, a present from one grateful group of passengers that had sailed in his charge on the *Susan Gatskill.*

"Well, well!" he said. "Let's think of it. Let's see, where's my glass? Here 'tis."

He seized the old-fashioned collapsible spyglass, which he favored rather than the newer binoculars, and started off to "pace the quarter," as he called the path from the back door to the grassy cart track which joined the road at the lower corner of the Ball premises. This highway wandered down from the Head into the fishing village along the inner beach of Big Wreck Cove. Prudence watched Ira with fond but comprehending eyes. She saw how broken he was, how stumbling his feet when he first started off, and the swaying locomotion that betrayed that feebleness of both brain and body that can never be denied.

Somewhere on the Head in the old days the wreckers had kept their outlook for ships in distress. Those harpies of the coast had fattened on the bones of storm-racked craft. It was one of those battered freighters that, nearly two centuries before, had been driven into the cove itself, to become embalmed in Cape history as "the big wreck."

The Balls and the Lathams, the Honeys and the Coffins of that ancient day had "wracked" the stranded craft most thoroughly. But they had not

overlooked the salvation of her ship's company of foreigners. She had been a Portuguese vessel, and although the Cape Codder, then, as now, was opposed to "foreigners," refuge was extended to the people saved from the big wreck.

Near the straggling settlement at the cove a group of shacks had sprung up to shelter the "Portygees" from the stranded vessel. As her bones were slowly engulfed in the marching sands, through the decades that passed, the people who had come ashore from the big wreck had waxed well to do, bred families of strong, handsome, brown men and black-eyed, glossy-haired women who flashed their white teeth in smiles that were almost startling. Now one end of "the port," as the village of Big Wreck Cove was usually called by the natives, was known as Portygee Town.

Wreckers' Head boasted of several homes of retired shipmasters and owners of Cap'n Ira's ilk. These ancient sea dogs, on such a day as this, were unfailingly found "walking the poop" of their front yards, or wherever they could take their diurnal exercise, binoculars or spyglass in hand, their vision more often fixed seaward than on the land.

Cap'n Ira had scarcely put the glass to his eye for a first squint at his "position" when he exclaimed:

"I swan! That's a master-pretty sight. I ain't

seen a prettier in many a day. Come here and look at this craft, Prudence."

She hurried to join him. Her motions when she was on her feet were birdlike, yet there was the same unsteadiness in her walk as in Cap'n Ira's. Only, at the moment, he did not see it, for his eye was glued to the telescope.

"What do you see, Ira?" she asked.

"Clap this glass to your eye," said her husband. He steadied the telescope, having pointed it for her. "See that suit of sails? Ain't they grand? And the taper of them masts? She's a bird!"

"Why, what schooner is it?" asked Prudence. "I never saw her before, did I? She's bearing in for the cove."

"I cal'late she is," agreed Cap'n Ira. "And I cal'late by the newness of that suit of sails and her lines and all that she's Tunis Latham's new craft that he went up to Marblehead last week to bring down here and put into commission."

"The *Seamew!*" cried Prudence, in a pleased voice. "Isn't she a pretty sight?"

"She's a sightly craft. Looks more like a racing yacht than a cargo boat. Still and all, Tunis has got judgment. And he's put nigh every cent he's got, all Peke Latham left him, into this schooner. And she not new."

"I hope Tunis has made no mistake," sighed Prudence, releasing the glass for Ira to look through

once more. "There has been trouble enough over Peleg Latham's money."

"More trouble than the money amounted to. Split the family wide open. 'Rion Latham was saying to me he believed Peke never meant the money should go all one way. The Medway Lathams, them 'Rion belongs to, is all as sore as carbuncles about Tunis getting it. But I tell Tunis as long as the court says the money should be his, let 'Rion and all them yap like the hungry dogs they be. Tunis has got the marrer bone."

"Does seem a pity," the old woman said, still watching the white splotch against the background of gray and blue. "Families ought to be at peace."

"Peace! I swan!" snorted Cap'n Ira. "'Rion Latham is about as much given to peace as a wild tagger. But he knows which half of his biscuit's buttered. He'll sail with Tunis as long as Tunis pays him wages."

The captain continued to study the approaching schooner while Prudence went back to her household tasks.

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTAIN OF THE SEAMEW

TUNIS LATHAM'S *Seamew*, tacking for the channel into Big Wreck Cove, wings full-spread, skimming the heaving blue of the summer sea, looked like a huge member of the tern family. From Wreckers' Head and the other sand bluffs guarding this roadstead from the heave of the Atlantic rollers, the schooner with her yachtlike lines was truly a picture to please the most exacting mariner.

On her deck paced the young captain whose personal affairs had been a subject of comment between Cap'n Ira Ball and his wife. He was a heavy-set, upstanding, blue-jerseyed figure, lithe and as spry on his feet as a cat. Tunis Latham was thirty, handsome in the bold way of longshore men, and ruddy-faced. He had crisp, short, sandy hair; his cheeks, chin, and lip were scraped as clean as his palm; his eyes were like blue-steel points, but with humorous wrinkles at the outer corners of

them, matched by a faint smile that almost always wreathed his lips. Altogether he was a man that a woman would be sure to look at twice.

The revelation of the lighter traits of his character counteracted the otherwise sober look of Tunis Latham. His sternness and fitness to command were revealed at first glance; his softer attributes dawned upon one later.

As he swayed back and forth across the deck of the flying *Seamew,* rolling easily in sailor gait to the pitching of the schooner, his sharp glance cast alow and then aloft betrayed the keen perception and attentive mind of the master mariner, while his surface appearance merely suggested a young man pridefully enjoying the novelty of pacing the deck of his first command. For this was the maiden trip of the *Seamew* under this name and commanded by this master.

She was not a new vessel, but neither was she old. At least, her decks were not marred, her rails were ungashed with the wear of lines, and even her fenders were almost shop-new. Of course, any craft may have a fresh suit of sails; and new paint and gilding on the figurehead or a new name board under the stern do not bespeak a craft just off the builder's ways. Yet there was an appearance about the schooner-yacht which would assure any able seaman at first glance that she was still to be sea-

tried. She was like a maiden at her first dance, just venturing out upon the floor.

An old salt hung to the *Seamew's* wheel as the bonny craft sped channelward. Horace Newbegin was a veritable sea dog. He had sailed every navigable sea in all this watery world, and sailed in almost every conceivable sort of craft. And he had sailed many voyages under Tunis Latham's father, who had owned and commanded the four-master *Ada May,* which, ill-freighted and ill-fated at last, had struck and sunk on the outer Hebrides, carrying to the bottom most of the hands as well as the commander of the partially insured ship.

This misfortune had kept Tunis Latham out of a command of his own until he was thirty; for Cape Cod boys that come of masters' families and are born navigators usually tread their own decks years before the age at which Tunis was pacing that of the *Seamew* on this summer day.

"How does she handle now, Horry?" asked the skipper, wheeling suddenly to face the old steersman.

"Thar's still that tug to sta'bo'd, Captain Tunis," growled the old man.

"But you keep her full on her course."

"Spite o' that? In course. But I can feel her tuggin' like a big bluefish trying to bolt with hook and sinker. Never did feel that same tug to sta'bo'd but once before on any craft. I told you that."

Tunis Latham nodded. The old man's keen eyes tried to read the skipper's face. He could scan the signs in sea and sky at a glance, but he confessed that the captain of the *Seamew* revealed no more of his inner thoughts than had the mahogany countenance of the older Captain Latham with whom Horry Newbegin had so long sailed.

"Well," the steersman said finally, "I've told ye all I can tell ye. That other schooner that had a tug to sta'bo'd like this, the *Marlin B.*, got a bad name from the Georges to Monomoy P'int. You know that."

"Cat's foot!" ejaculated Tunis cheerfully. "The *Marlin B.* was sold for a pleasure yacht and taken half around the world. A Chilean guano millionaire bought her the year after the Sutro Brothers took her off the Banks."

"Ye-as. That's what Sutro Brothers says," and the old man wagged his head doubtfully. "But there's just as much difference in ships as there is in men. Ain't never been two men just per*zact*-ly alike. No two craft ever sailed or steered same as same, Captain Tunis. I steered the *Marlin B.* out o' Salem on her second trip, without knowing what she'd been through, you can believe, on her first."

"Well, well!" Tunis broke in sharply. "Just keep your mind on what you are doing now, Horry. You're supposed to be steering the *Seamew* into

Big Wreck Cove. Don't undertake to shave a piece off the Lighthouse Point reef."

The steersman did not answer. From long experience with these Lathams, Horace Newbegin knew just how much interference or advice they would stand.

"And, by gum, that ain't much!" he growled to himself.

He took the beautifully sailing schooner in through the channel in a masterly manner. He knew that more ancient skippers than Cap'n Ira Ball, up there on Wreckers' Head, would be watching the *Seamew* make the cove, and old Horry Newbegin wanted them to say it was well done.

Half an hour later the anchor was dropped fifty yards off Portygee Town. Captain Tunis ordered the gig lowered to take him ashore and, after giving the mate some instructions regarding stowage and the men's shore leave, he was rowed over to Luiz Wharf. 'Rion Latham, a red-headed, pimply faced young man, sidled up to Horace Newbegin.

"Well, what do you think of the hoodoo ship, Horrors?" he hoarsely whispered.

Newbegin stared at him unwaveringly, and the red-haired one repeated the question. The old salt finally batted one eye, slowly and impressively.

"D'you know what answer the little boy got that asked the quahog the time o' day?" he drawled. "Not a word. Not a derned word, 'Rion."

Landing at the fish wharf, Tunis Latham walked up the straggling street of the district inhabited for the most part by smiling brown men and women. Fayal and Cape Cod are strangely analogous, especially upon a summer's day. The houses he passed had one room; they were little more than shacks. But there were gay colors everywhere in the dress of both men and women. It was believed that these Portygee fishermen would have their seines dyed red and yellow if the fish would swim into them.

A young woman sitting upon a doorstep, nursing a little, bald, brown-headed baby, dropped a gay handkerchief over her bared bosom but nodded and smiled at the captain of the *Seamew* with right good fellowship. He knew all these people, and most of them, the young women at least, admired Tunis; but he was too self-centered and busied with his own thoughts and affairs to comprehend this.

At the corner of one of the houses a girl stood —a tall, lean-flanked, but deep-bosomed creature, as graceful as a well-grown sapling. Her calico frock clung to the lines of her matured figure as though she had just stepped up out of the sea itself. Around her head she had banded a crimson bandanna, but it allowed the escape of glossy black hair that waved prettily. Her lips were as red as poppies, full, voluptuous; her eyes were sloe-black and as soft as a cow's. Fortunately for the languishing girl's peace of mind—she had placed her-

self there at the corner of the house to wait for Tunis since the moment the *Seamew* had dropped anchor—she did not know that the young captain had noticed her only as "that cow" as he swung by on his way to the road that wound up the slope of Wreckers' Head.

Neither Eunez Pareta—nor any other girl of the port, Portygee or Yankee—had ever made Tunis Latham's heart flutter. He was not impervious to the blandishments of all feminine beauty. As Cap'n Ira Ball would have said, Tunis was "a general admirer of the sect." And as the young man passed the languishing Eunez with a cheerful nod and smile there flashed into his memory an entirely different picture, but one of a girl nevertheless. Somehow the memory of that girl in Scollay Square kept coming back to his mind.

He had gone up by train for the *Seamew* and her crew, and naturally he had spent one night in Boston. Coming up out of the North End after a late supper, he had stopped upon one side of the square to watch the passing throng, some hurrying home from work, some hurrying to theaters and other places of amusement, but all hurrying. Nowhere did he see the slow, but carrying, stride of a man used to open spaces. And the narrow-skirted girls could scarcely hobble.

A narrow skirt, however, had not led Tunis Latham to give particular note to one certain girl

in the throng. She had stepped through the door of a cheap but garish restaurant. Somebody had thrown a peeling on the sidewalk, and she had slipped on it. Tunis had leaped and caught her before she measured her length. She looked up into his face with startled, violet eyes that seemed, in that one moment, to hold in them a fascination and power that the Cape man had never dreamed a woman's eyes could possess.

"You're all right, ma'am," he said, confused, setting her firmly on her feet.

"My skirt!" She almost whispered it. There seemed to be not a shyness, but a terrified timidity in her voice and manner. Tunis saw that the shabby skirt was torn widely at the hem.

"Let's go somewhere and get that fixed," he suggested awkwardly.

"Thank you, sir. I will go back into the restaurant. I work there. I can get a pin or two."

He had to let her go, of course. Nor could he follow her. He lacked the boldness that might have led another man to enter the restaurant and order something to eat for the sake of seeing what became of the girl with the violet eyes and colorless velvet cheeks. There had been an appeal in her countenance that called Tunis more and more as he dreamed about her.

And standing there on Scollay Square dreaming about her had done the young captain of the *Sea-*

mew positively no good! She did not come out again, although he stood there for fully an hour. At the end of that time he strolled up an alley and discovered that there was a side door to the restaurant for the use of employees, and he judged that the girl, seeing him lingering in front, had gone out by this way. It made him flush to his ears when he thought of it. Of course, he had been rude.

Marching up the winding road by the Ball homestead, Tunis Latham revisioned this adventure—and the violet-eyed girl. Well, he probably would never see her again. And in any case she was not the sort of girl that he would ever take home to Aunt Lucretia. He was headed toward home now, to the old brown house in the saucer-like valley some distance beyond Cap'n Ira's.

As he came within hail of the old homestead in which the Balls had been born and had died—if they were not lost at sea—for many generations, the captain of the *Seamew* became suddenly aware that something was particularly wrong there. He heard somebody shouting. Was it for help? He hastened his stride.

Quite unexpectedly the hobbling figure of Cap'n Ira appeared in the open barn door. He saw Tunis. He waved his cane in one hand and beckoned wildly with the other. Then he disappeared.

The young captain vaulted the fence and ran

across the ill-tended garden adjoining the Balls' side yard. Again he heard Cap'n Ira's hail.

"Come on in here, Tunis!"

"What's the matter, Cap'n Ira?"

"That dratted Queen of Sheby! I knowed she'd be the death of one of us some day. I swan! Tunis Latham, come here! I can't get her out, and you know derned well Prudence can't stand on her head that a way without strangling. Lend us a hand, boy. This is something awful! Something awful!"

Tunis Latham, much disturbed by the old man's words and excited manner, pushed into the dimly lit interior of the barn.

CHAPTER III

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

THE barn was a roomy place, as well built as the Ball house itself, and quite as old. The wagon floor had a wide door, front and rear. The stables were on either side of this floor and the mows were above. In one mow was a small quantity of hay and some corn fodder, but the upper reaches were filled only with a brown dusk.

The pale face of a gray mare was visible at the opening over one of the mangers. She was the sole recognized occupant of the stable. In a dark corner Tunis Latham saw a huge grain box, for once the Ball farm had supported several span of oxen and a considerable dairy herd, its cover raised and its maw gaping wide. There was something moving there in the murk, something fluttering.

"Come here, boy!" gasped Cap'n Ira, hurrying across the barn door. "I'm so crippled I can't git her up, and she's dove clean to the lower hold, tryin'

to scrape out a capful o' oats for that dratted Queen of Sheby."

"Aunt Prue!" shouted Tunis, reverting to the title he had addressed her by in his boyhood. "It's never her?"

A muffled voice stammered:

"Get me out! Get me out!"

"Heave hard, Tunis! All together now!" gasped Cap'n Ira, as the younger man reached over the old woman's struggling heels and seized her around the waist.

"Up she comes!" continued the excited old man, as though he were bossing a capstan crew starting one of the *Susan Gatskill's* anchors.

Tunis Latham set Prudence Ball on her feet, but the old woman was forced to lean against the stalwart young man for a minute. She addressed her husband in some heat.

"Goodness gracious gallop! Why don't you sing a chantey over me, I want to know? You'd think I was a bale of jute being snaked out of a ship's hold. Good land!"

"There, there, Prudence!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira. "You're safe, after all! It—it was something awful!"

"I cal'late it was," rejoined the old woman rather bitterly. "And I didn't get them oats, after all."

"I'll 'tend to all that, Aunt Prue," said Tunis.

"If it hadn't been for that dratted Queen of

Sheby"—Cap'n Ira glared malevolently at the rather surprised-looking countenance of the gray mare in her box—"you wouldn't have got into that jam."

"If it hadn't been for you taking that dose of snuff when I was expecting nothing of the kind, I wouldn't have dove into that feed box, Ira, and you know it very well."

"I swan!" admitted her husband in a feeble voice. "I forgot again, didn't I?"

"I don't know as you forgot, but I know you mighty near sneezed your head off. You'll be the death of me some day, Ira, blowin' up that way. I wonder I didn't jump clean through the bottom of that feed box when I was just reaching down to get a measure of oats."

"Aunt Prue," Tunis interposed, "why do you keep the little tad of feed you have to buy for Queenie in this big old chest?"

"There!" Cap'n Ira hastened to rejoin, glad likewise to turn the trend of conversation. "That's all that dratted boy's doings, little John-Ed Williams. Who else would have ever thought of dumping a two-bushel bag of oats into a twenty-bushel bin? We always put feed in that covered can yonder, so as to keep shet of the rats. But that boy, when he brought the oats, dumped 'em into the box before I could stop him. He's got less sense than his father; and you know, Tunis, John-Ed himself ain't got much more wit than the law allows."

"But if you hadn't sneezed——" began Prudence again.

"You take her into the house, Cap'n Ira," said Tunis. "I'll feed Queenie. What do you give her —this measure full of oats? And a hank of that hay?"

"And a bunch of fodder. Might as well give her a dinner while you're about it," grumbled the old man, leading his tottering wife toward the door. "As I say, that old critter is eatin' her head off."

"Well, she long ago earned her keep in her old age," Tunis said, laughing.

He could remember when the Queen of Sheba had come to the Ball barn as a colt. Many a clandestine bareback ride had he enjoyed. He fed the mare and petted her as if she were his own. Then he scraped the oats out of the bin and poured them into the galvanized-iron can, so that Cap'n Ira could more easily get at the mare's feed.

He went to the house afterward to see if there was any other little chore he could do for the old couple before going on to his own home.

"You can't do much for us, Tunis, unless you can furnish me a new pair of legs," said Cap'n Ira. "I might as well have timber ones as these I've got. What Prue and me needs is what you've got but can't give away—youth."

"You ought to have somebody living with you to help, Cap'n Ira," said the young man.

"I cal'late," said the other dryly, "that we've already made that discovery, Tunis. Trouble is, we ain't fixed right to increase the pay roll. I'd like to know who you'd think would want to sign up on this craft that even the rats have deserted?"

"Never mind, Ira. Don't be downhearted," Prudence said, now recovered from her excitement. "Perhaps the Lord has something good in store for us."

Cap'n Ira pursed his lips.

"I ain't doubting the Lord's stores is plentiful," he returned rather irreverently. "The trouble is for us poor mortals to get at 'em. Well, Tunis, I certainly am obliged to you."

The flurry of excitement was over. But Ira Ball was a determined man. It was in his mind that the trouble of taking care of the old mare was too great for Prudence, and he could not do the barn chores himself. They really had no use for the gray mare, for nowadays the neighbors did all their errands in town for them, and the few remaining acres of the old farm lay fallow.

Nor, had he desired to sell the mare, would anybody be willing to pay much for the twenty-two-year-old Queenie. In truth, Ira Ball was too tender-hearted to think of giving the Queen of Sheba over to a new owner and so sentence her to painful toil.

"She'd be a sight better off in the horse heaven,

wherever that is," he decided. But he was careful to say nothing like this in his wife's hearing. "Women are funny that way," he considered. "She'd rather let the decrepit old critter hang around eatin' her head off, like I say, than mercifully put her out of her misery."

Stern times call for stern methods. Cap'n Ira Ball had seen the tragic moment when he was forced to separate a bridegroom from his bride with a sinking deck all but awash under his feet. What had to be done had to be done! Prudence could no longer be endangered by the stable tasks connected with the old mare. He could not relieve her. They could scarcely afford a hired hand merely to take care of Queenie.

He remained rather silent that evening, and even forgot to praise Prue's hot biscuit, of which he ate a good many with his creamed pollack. The sweet-tempered old woman chatted as she knitted on his blue-wool hose, but she scarcely expected more than his occasional grunted acknowledgment that he was listening. She always said it was "a joy to have somebody besides the cat around to talk to." The loneliness of shipmasters who sail the seven seas is often mentioned in song and in story; the loneliness of their wives at home is not usually marked.

They went to bed. Old men do not usually sleep much after second cock-crow, and it was not far from three in the morning when Cap'n Ira awoke.

Like most mariners, he was wide awake when he opened his eyes. He lay quietly for several moments in the broad bed he occupied alone. The half-sobbing breathing of the old woman sounded from her room, through the open door.

"It's got to be done," Cap'n Ira almost audibly repeated.

He got out of the bed with care. It was both a difficult and a painful task to dress. When he had on all but his boots and hat he tiptoed to a green sea chest in the corner, unlocked it, and from beneath certain tarpaulins and other sea rubbish drew out something which he examined carefully in the semidarkness of the chamber. He finally tucked this into an inner pocket of the double-breasted pilot coat he wore. It sagged the coat a good deal on that side.

He crept out of the chamber, crossed the sitting room, and went into the ell-kitchen with his shoes in his hand. When he opened the back door he faced the west, but even the sky at that point of the compass showed the glow of the false dawn. Down in the cove the night mist wrapped the shipping about in an almost opaque veil. Only the lofty tops of craft like the *Seamew* were visible, black streaks against the mother-of-pearl sky line.

The captain closed the kitchen door softly behind him. He sat down on a bench and painfully pulled on his shoes and laced them. When he tried to

straighten up it was by a method which he termed, "easy, by jerks." He sat and recovered his breath after the effort.

Then, taking his cane, he hobbled off to the barn. The big doors were open, for it had been a warm night. The pungent odor from Queenie's stall made his nostrils wrinkle. He stumbled in, and the pale face of the old mare appeared at the opening above her manger. She snorted her surprise.

"You'll snort more'n that afore I'm done with you," Cap'n Ira said, trying to seem embittered.

But when he unknotted the halter and backed her out of the stable, quite involuntarily he ran a tender hand down her sleek neck. He sighed as he led her out of the rear door.

The old mare hung back, stretching first one hind leg and then the other as old horses do when first they come from the stall in the morning.

"Come on, you old nuisance!" exploded Cap'n Ira under his breath, giving an impatient tug at the rope.

He did not look around at her, but set his face sternly toward the distant lot which had once been known as the east meadow. It was no longer in grass. Wild carrots sprang from its acidulous soil. The herbage would scarcely have nourished sheep. There were patches of that gray moss which blossoms with a tiny red flower, and there was mullein and sour grass. Altogether the run-down condition

of the soil could not be mistaken by even the casual eye.

The hobbling old man and the hobbling old mare, making their way across the bare lot, made as drab a picture in the early morning as a Millet. At a distance their moving shapes would have seemed like shadows only. There was no other sign of life upon Wreckers' Head.

A light but keen and salty breath blew in from the sea. Cap'n Ira faced this breeze with twitching nostrils. The old mare's lower lip hung down in depression. She groaned. She did not care to be led out of her comfortable stall at this unconscionably early hour.

"Grunt, you old nuisance!" muttered Cap'n Ira bitterly. "You don't even know what a dratted, useless thing you be, I swan!"

There was a depression in the field. When the heavy spring and fall rains came the water ran down into this sink and stood, sometimes a foot or two deep over several acres. In some past time of heavy flood the water had washed out to the edge of the highland overlooking the ocean beach. There it had crumbled the brink of the Head away, the water gullying year after year a deeper and broader channel, until now the slanting gutter began a hundred yards back from the brink.

The recurrent downpours, aided by occasional landslips, had made a slanting trough to the beach

itself, which was all of two hundred feet below the brink of Wreckers' Head. Many such water-worn gullies are to be found along the face of the Cape headlands, up which the fishermen and seaweed gatherers freight their cargoes from the shore. There was no wheel track here; merely a trough of sliding sand, treacherous under foot and almost continuously in motion. As the gully progressed seaward, the banks on either hand became more than forty feet high, the trough itself being scarcely half as wide.

Determinedly Cap'n Ira led the old mare into and down the slope of this gully.

It was steep. He went ahead haltingly, trying to steady his footsteps with the cane, which sank deeply into the sand, making orifices which, in the pale light of the dawn, seemed to startle the mare. She held back, scuffling and snorting.

"Come on, drat ye!" adjured the captain. "You needn't blow your nose. You ain't been taking snuff."

The sand was so light and dry that it seemed to be on the move all about them. There was a stealthy sound to the whispering particles, too, as though they breathed. "Hush! Hush-sh-sh!" The old man was made nervous by it. He began to glance back over his shoulder at the faintly objecting mare. When Queenie slipped a little and scrambled in the unstable sand he uttered such an

exclamation as might have been wrung from him at time of stress upon his quarter-deck.

"I swan! I'd rather be keelhauled than do this," burst from his lips finally.

But they were well into the gully now. The walls on either hand towered far above their heads. He halted, and the mare stood still, again blowing softly through her nostrils.

The old man, with shaking hands, took from under his coat the heavy article that had sagged his pocket. It was a black, old-fashioned, seven-chambered revolver, well oiled and as grim-looking as a rifled cannon on a battleship. He produced three greased cartridges, broke the weapon, inserted the cartridges, then closed it and spun the cylinder. It was not an unfamiliar weapon, this. Its mere grim appearance, stuck into Cap'n Ira's waistband, had once quelled mutiny aboard the *Susan Gatskill.*

While he was thus engaged he had not even glanced around at the old mare. Suddenly he felt a touch upon his shoulder, then upon the sleeve of his coat. He felt a creepy chill the length of his spine. It seemed as if the hand of Prudence had been laid softly upon him.

"I swan!" he gulped, shaking himself. "I'm as flighty as a gal. What th'——" He looked back. Queenie was nuzzling his arm questioningly. Her ears were cocked forward; her surprised face was almost ridiculously human in its expression.

Cap'n Ira groaned again. He shuddered. But his gnarled hand gripped the hard-rubber butt of the revolver with the desperation of the deed he had screwed his courage to do. Better the old mare should be put out of the way than that she should fall into hands that would misuse her. And he feared what other accident might happen if Prudence continued to take care of the animal.

"I swan! It's a wrench," admitted Cap'n Ira, swerving to point the muzzle of the revolver at the gray mare.

He looked all about again. Yes, the position was right. If she fell here, a man with a shovel could easily pry down tons of sand from either bank upon her in a few minutes. The burial might be done by himself without any other soul knowing what had become of Queenie.

He cocked the old revolver.

Suddenly the Queen of Sheba gave a snort of alarm. She looked back over her withers. The light in the cut between the sand banks was dim. Was somebody coming?

To tell the truth, Cap'n Ira had a vision of Prudence, having missed him, getting out of her bed and traveling down through the lots after him and the old mare. The idea shook him to his marrow, or was it the weight of the heavy weapon that made his hand so unsteady?

"I swan!" His oft-repeated ejaculation was almost a prayer.

At the moment he felt the sand giving under his feet. The old mare uttered again her terrified snort. He saw dimly the path behind them moving—a swift, serpentlike slide. Heavy as the mare was, she felt the landslip, too.

Cap'n Ira was not a man who easily lost his self-possession. He had been through too much to show the white flag when danger menaced. He realized that peril threatened now.

He turned squarely about and, cocked pistol in one hand and huge-knobbed cane in the other, he started away from the spot at a cripple's gallop. The whole trough of the gully of sand seemed to be in motion. Behind him the old mare scrambled and whistled with fear, quite as unable to keep her feet as was the captain.

For, before he had gone far, Cap'n Ira found himself seated on the moving plane of sand. He glanced fearfully behind him. The Queen of Sheba was seated on her tail, her forefeet braced against nothing more stable than the avalanche itself, and she was sailing down the slope behind him like a winged Pegasus!

"My soul and body!" ejaculated Cap'n Ira. "We're certainly on our way."

CHAPTER IV

AT THE LATHAM HOUSE

The Latham house stood in the middle of the shallow valley behind Wreckers' Head. The fields surrounding it were arable and well kept. The house was not as old as the Ball house and was of an entirely different style of architecture. Whereas the Ball house was low-roofed and sprawling, squatting like a huge and ugly toad on the gale-swept Head, the house Tunis Latham's grandfather had built was three-story, including the mansard roof, painted a tobacco brown, and it was surrounded by wry-limbed cedars which could grow here because they were sheltered from the gales.

It was a gloomy-looking house even in midsummer, standing like a grim figure menaced by the tortured limbs of the trees surrounding it, stark and alone. No other human habitation was in view from its site. The Latham who had built the twelve-room house had built on hope. He desired

and expected to fill the great house with a breed of Lathams that would do honor to the Cape on sea and on land. But his young wife had died the next year, after giving birth to her second child.

Tunis Latham's father, Randall Latham, had been the elder Latham's sole hope of perpetuating the family name and filling the big, ugly brown house behind Wreckers' Head with tow-headed little Lathams, for the other child was a girl.

It was said that Medford Latham had seldom spoken to or of his daughter, Lucretia. She must have led a very lonely and repressed life while she was a little girl. Medford Latham did not go to sea, for he had business that kept him on shore.

Medford Latham lived long enough to see Randall grow up, walk his own quarter-deck, and marry a maiden from the port who promised to be able to fulfill his hopes of a flourishing houseful of children. She bore Tunis while young Captain Randall Latham was away, and he came back in time to christen the boy with the name of the most colorful city he had touched on the trip, not an uncommon practice of seagoing fathers on the Cape. But Mrs. Randall Latham, watching her husband's ship bear off to seaward in the face of a keen gale, caught a severe cold, and when Captain Randall returned the next time he came not to a cradle in the great living room of the big, brown house, but to an

already-sodden grave in the family plot on the west side of the saucerlike valley.

Lucretia Latham had grown to be a tall, large-boned, silent, and quick-stepping woman—a woman of understanding and infinite tenderness, although this tenderness was exhibited in deeds, not words.

The big, quiet-faced woman, who had never had a lover and on whom no man had ever looked with admiration, seemed to the casual observer cold and uncompromising. She might speak to the dog, call the fowls to their meals, but she never otherwise spoke unless she was forced to. When he was little, Tunis had found in her arms and against her breast a refuge from all hurt and fear, but it was a wordless comfort Aunt Lucretia gave him.

When he walked over from the cove that afternoon, after seeing the anchor of the *Seamew* overside for the first time in this roadstead, Tunis found his Aunt Lucretia much as usual. She watched him approach from the side porch, a warm smile of greeting on her rather gaunt face. He knew that she must have watched the *Seamew* skim by, making for the channel into the cove; for he had written her when to expect him. But she would say nothing about it unless he forced the gates of her silence by some direct question which demanded more than a "yes" or a "no."

Lucretia folded him in her arms, however, and patted his broad shoulder with little love pats as he

put his arms about her. Her kiss for him was as warm on his lips as a girl's. They understood each other pretty well, these two; for Tunis had caught something of her muteness, living so long alone with her.

He went to wash and change his shirt. Then he sat down in one of the huge porch chairs and rocked quietly, waiting for supper. He could see into the kitchen, which was the family dining room as well, and when he saw his Aunt Lucretia take the coffee-pot from the stove and put it on the square Dutch tile by her own place, Tunis knew it was the only call to supper there would be.

He rose and went in, taking his place at the head of the table. His aunt's head was bowed and her lips moved soundlessly. He respected her whispered grace and always felt that he could add nothing to it in thankfulness or reverence if he uttered an orison himself. During the cheerful and plentiful meal the young captain of the *Seamew* related certain matters he thought would interest the woman regarding his purchase of the schooner and the voyage down to the Cape. He told her he was sure the *Seamew* was fast enough for a Boston market boat.

"Speed is what is wanted now to compete with the Old Colony," Tunis declared. "We've got fish and clams and cranberries in season, and some vegetables, that have to be shaken up and jounced

together and squashed on those jolting steam trains. I'll lay down a crate of lobsters at the T-wharf without a hair being ruffled. I know how to stow a cargo."

She nodded both her understanding and her belief that Tunis was right. The legacy he had received from the estate of Peleg Latham, Medford Latham's brother, had enabled Tunis to buy this beautiful schooner. Undoubtedly an eye for the beauty of the craft had more than a little drawn the young man into her purchase. Yet there was a foundation of solid sense under his streak of romance.

In this day a man must serve a long apprenticeship before he gets a command unless he owns the craft on which he is skipper. To own a schooner of the size of the *Seamew* is not enough. One must be a good merchant as well as a good skipper.

The coast trade from port to port along the North Atlantic shore must be fostered and coaxed like a stumbling baby. The tentacles of the hated railroad reach to many of the Cape ports. Yet everybody knows that a cargo properly stowed in a seaworthy craft reaches market in much the better condition than by rail, though perhaps it is some hours longer on the way.

There were docks, too, at which Tunis Latham could pick up well-paying freights which would have to be carted over bad roads to the nearest

railway station. And there were always full or part cargoes to be had at Boston for certain single consignees along the Cape, which would pay a fair profit on the upkeep of the schooner. Medford Latham had lost almost all his fortune before he died so unhappily, leaving only the homestead and small farm to his son. The son, Captain Randall Latham, had lost the ship *Ada May* and every cent he possessed. Tunis had only his great uncle's legacy to begin on, and he had waited for that until he was thirty.

In the morning the young man arose early, for the tide was then low, and started forth with basket and clam hoe on his arm. Aunt Lucretia had promised him, by a smiling nod, a mess of fritters for dinner if he would supply the necessary clams. Alongshore the soft clam is the only clam used for fritters; the tough, long-keeping quahog is shipped to the less-enlightened "city trade."

It was not yet sunrise, but as Tunis walked down through one of those cuts in the edge of the headland, following a well-defined cart track, he saw the rose-glow of the sun's round face staining the mist on the eastern horizon.

He came down upon the hard sand of the beach and walked toward a tiny cove into which the mud flats extended and on which he knew the clams were plentiful and ripe. Glistening pools of black water, showing where other diggers had raided the

flat, were interspersed with trembling patches of black sand. When Tunis began to cross the flat the sand before his boots became alive with tiny, shooting geysers of clean water. He set to work.

And while he was thus engaged he heard suddenly a shrill outcry and a most mysterious sound up in one of the gullies toward the summit of Wreckers' Head. Here thousands of tons of sand had run out of the cut in the steep bank and formed a dykelike way to the beach itself. More and more sand was slipping down this way all the time. A strong man could scarcely make his way up the incline, the sand was so unstable.

Tunis stood and stared up the slope. There shot into view, carried rapidly upon the forefront of the avalanche, a white-haired old man who waved a stick in one hand and a cocked pistol in the other, while from his mouth came shrill cries of excitement, if not of alarm.

But it was what followed Cap'n Ira Ball—whom Tunis immediately recognized—that caused the captain of the *Seamew* such utter surprise. Sitting on her rump, pawing at the sliding sand with her front hoofs, and whistling her terror and amazement, the Queen of Sheba appeared flying after the harassed old man.

It was a scene to surprise more than to entertain the beholder. The avalanche promised disaster to the participants in it. Tons upon tons of sand,

undulating and sinuous in appearance, traveled faster and yet faster behind the old gray mare and the gray old sea captain. The smoke of the slide hid all that lay behind them, and these wreaths of sand dust threatened a higher wave that might, at any moment, entirely overwhelm both the equine and the human victim of the catastrophe.

Tunis dropped his clam hoe and started for the dyke of sand on the crest of which the old man and the old mare were sliding like naughty children down a woodshed roof.

"Hey, Tunis! Tunis!" bawled the captain. "Take her off'n me! She'll be afoul my hawser in another second, I do believe."

It was evident that he spoke of the Queen of Sheba, but Tunis could not see how the mare was intentionally threatening Cap'n Ira's peace of mind or safety of body. She was, however, "close aboard" Cap'n Ira as he tobogganed down the sandy way.

"Stern all!" shouted the old man, throwing another startled, backward glance at the Queen of Sheba. "Drat the derned old critter! Don't she know nothin' at all? Tunis! Do you see what's goin' to happen?"

While the young man had been running toward the ridge of sand, the avalanche bearing Cap'n Ira and the Queen of Sheba on its bosom swept down the slope of the huge windrow, but not altogether

along its spine. The mass slid over one pitch of the ridge, and suddenly, following on the heels of Cap'n Ira's final question, the old man was shot to the beach, several tons of loose sand and the snorting mare almost on top of him.

In fact, he would have been overwhelmed, and perhaps seriously hurt, had not Tunis Latham arrived at the spot at just the time Cap'n Ira did, and suddenly pulled out the old man.

"What are you doing? Trying to run a race with Queenie?" demanded the captain of the *Seamew.*

The mare had come down right side up, more by good luck than by good management. She stood deep in the sand, her naturally surprised expression vastly enhanced. In all her twenty-two years Queenie had never before gone through such an experience.

"I swan!" ejaculated Cap'n Ira. "Ain't this the beatenest you ever heard of, Tunis?"

Tunis stared from the old mare to the old mariner, especially at the cocked revolver in the captain's hand. He pointed at the tightly gripped weapon.

"What's that for, Cap'n Ira?" he asked.

"I—I—well, I swan!" stammered Cap'n Ira, now looking, himself, at the old seven-chambered revolver as though he had never seen it before. "I cal'late it does look sort o' funny to you, Tunis,

to see me come sailing down this way, armed like a pirate."

"I wouldn't call it exactly funny. But it is surprising," admitted Tunis. "And Queenie looks as surprised as anybody."

"Yes, she does, for a fact," agreed Cap'n Ira, squinting across the heap of loose sand at the gray mare. "I kind o' wonder what she's thinking about."

"I'm wondering hard enough myself," put in Tunis pointedly.

"I swan!" murmured Cap'n Ira reflectively.

He carefully lowered the hammer of the pistol, his cane stuck upright in the sand before him. Then he put the weapon back in the inside pocket of his coat. He tapped the knob of his cane for a pinch of snuff before he said another word. His mighty "A-choon!" startled the Queen of Sheba almost as it startled Prudence.

"Avast!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira. "Did you ever see such a scary old lubber, Tunis?"

"But what's it all about?" again demanded the younger man, seizing the rope halter and aiding the mare to flounder out upon the firmer sand below high-water mark. "What are you doing up so early? And what were you going to do with Queenie?"

"I swan!" groaned Cap'n Ira again. "I don't wonder that you ask me that. It don't really seem

reasonable that a sane man would get in such a jam, does it? Me and the Queen of Sheby sailin' down that sand pile. Tunis! We'll never be able to get up it in this world."

"No. You must come along to our road, and get up that way," his young friend told him. "It is longer, but easier. But tell me how you came down that gully, you and Queenie?"

"I'm sort of ashamed to tell you, Tunis, and that's a fact," the old captain said, wagging his head. "And don't you ever tell Prudence."

"I'll not say a word to Aunt Prue," promised the captain of the *Seamew*.

"Yet," grumbled the old man, "that dratted Queen of Sheby is too much for Prudence. You see yourself only yesterday how she is like to come to her death because of the mare."

"I know that you should have somebody living with you, Cap'n Ira," urged Tunis. "But what does *this* mean?"

"I—I can't scurcely tell you, Tunis. I swan! I was goin' to murder the old critter."

"What do you mean?" gasped Tunis in apparent horror. "Not Aunt Prue?"

"What's the matter with you?" snapped Cap'n Ira. "I mean that old mare. I was going to murder her in cold blood, only the sand slide wrecked my plans."

"If you had killed her, Aunt Prue would have

had hard work to forgive you. Come on now. I'll lead Queenie up to our barn. Let her stay there for a spell. I tell you, Cap'n Ira, you and Aunt Prue must have somebody to live with you."

"Who?"

"Get a girl from the port."

"Huh! One o' them Portygees? They're as dirty and useless in the kitchen as their men folks are aboard ship."

"Oh, they are not all like that!" objected the captain of the *Seamew*. "I've got a good crew of 'em aboard my schooner."

"You think so. Wait till you get in a jam. And the men ain't so bad as the gals. All hussies."

"I don't know, then, what you'll do."

"I do," interrupted the old man, hobbling along the hard sand beside Tunis and the horse. "It's just like I told Prudence yesterday. I know just what we've got to do whether you or Prue or anybody else knows," and he was very emphatic.

"Let's hear your plan, Cap'n," said Tunis.

"It's like this," went on Cap'n Ira. "Prudence ain't got but one living relative, a grandniece, that's kin to her. That Ida May Bostwick we must have come and live with us, and that's all there is about it."

Tunis stared. He said:

"Never heard of her. She doesn't live anywhere around here, does she?"

"No, no! Lives to Boston."

"Boston!"

Why was it Tunis Latham felt that his heart skipped a beat? Memory of that pale, violet-eyed girl who worked in the restaurant on Scollay Square flashed across his mind like a shooting star. Indeed, he was so confused that he heard only a little at first of Cap'n Ira's rambling explanation. Then he caught:

"And if you will go to that address—Prue's got the street and number—and see Ida May Bostwick and tell her about us, you'd be doing us a kindness, Tunis."

"Me?" exclaimed the startled captain of the *Seamew*.

"Yes, you. The gal won't bite you. You're going to Boston next week, you say. Will you do it?"

"Sure I will, Cap'n Ira," said the young man heartily. "It's a good move, and I'll say all I can to get the girl to come down here."

"That's the boy! You're going on an errand of mercy; that's as sure as sure. Prue and me need that gal. And maybe she needs us. I don't know what sort of a place she works at, but no city job for a gal can be the equal of living down here on the Cape, with her own folks, as you might say. Yes, Tunis, you'll be doing an errand of mercy mebbe both ways."

CHAPTER V

LOOKING FOR IDA MAY

THE *Seamew* was put in commission in a very few days. Tunis Latham had many friends in and about Big Wreck Cove, and he had little difficulty in picking up a cargo, which was loaded right at the port.

As for the schooner's crew, Tunis could have filled every billet four times over had he so desired. But he had already picked his crew with some care. Mason Chapin was mate, a perfectly capable navigator who might have used his ticket to get a berth on a much larger craft than the *Seamew*. But he had an invalid wife and wished only to leave home on brief voyages. Johnny Lark was shipped as cook, with a Portygee boy, Tony, to help him.

Forward, Horace Newbegin served as boatswain and Orion Latham was a sort of supercargo and general handy man. He was Tunis' cousin, several times removed. There were four Portygees to make

up the company, a full crew for a sailing vessel of the tonnage of the *Seamew*. Yet every man was needed in handling her lofty canvas and in loading and unloading freight.

With a well-stowed cargo below deck the schooner sailed even better than she had in ballast. She slipped out of the cove through the rather tortuous channel like an eel through the meshes of a broken trap. In the dawn, and with a fresh outside breeze just ruffling the sea into whitecaps, they broke out her upper sails and caught the very last breath of the gale the canvas would draw.

Cap'n Ira, and even Prudence, had got up before daybreak to see the schooner pass. They watched her, turn and turn about at the spyglass, till she was blotted out by the distant fog bank.

"I swan," said the old man, "when she heaves into view again I hope she'll have Ida May Bostwick aboard! That is what *I* hope."

"The dear girl!" breathed Prudence.

It never crossed their simple minds that Ida May Bostwick might see this chance they offered her in a different light from that in which they looked at it. The old couple made their innocent plans for the welcoming of the "grandniece," positive that a happy future was in store for both Ida May and themselves.

In Tunis Latham's mind there was more uncertainty regarding the mysterious Ida May Bostwick

than there was in the minds of Cap'n Ira and Prudence. Whenever he considered his "errand of mercy" the captain of the *Seamew* had a flash of that girl with the violet eyes who worked in the restaurant on Scollay Square. The Balls did not know where Ida May worked. Prudence only had obtained the lodging-house address of her young relative from Annabell Coffin, "she who was a Cuttle."

Of course, it was merely a faint and tenuous possibility that Ida May was a waitress. Still fainter was the chance that she would prove to be the girl with the violet eyes that Tunis Latham remembered so distinctly. The Balls knew that she worked in a store, and all stores were the same to them. There might be a few hundred thousand other girls in Boston besides that particular girl whom he had saved from falling on the square.

Nevertheless, when the *Seamew* had unloaded and been warped to a berth in an outer tier of small craft to await her turn to load barrels and box shooks for a concern at Paulmouth, Captain Tunis started up into the city. He knew his way about Boston as well as any one not a native, and his first objective point was that restaurant on Scollay Square.

It was the dogwatch when Tunis Latham entered the eating place, but the dogwatch here was not at the same time of day as aboard ship. The cap-

tain's first startled glance about the room assured him that there was not a girl employee in sight, not even at the cashier's desk, and very few customers.

He ordered a late but hearty breakfast of the unshaven waiter in half-spoiled apron and coat who lounged over his table.

"I thought they used to have girl waiters in this place?' the captain said when the man brought the tableware and glass of water.

"On from 'leven till eight. You're too early if you got a jane in your eye, bo," was the ribald reply. "The boss is a good guy." He sneered in the direction of the black-haired, coarse-looking man in the cashier's cage. "He hires them girls for five dollars less a week than he'd have to pay union waiters, and he asks no questions." He closed his recital with a wink so full of meaning that Tunis' palm itched to slap him.

But the guest's wind-bitten face betrayed no confusion nor further interest. The waiter judged he had mistaken his man, after all, and sheered off until the ordered viands were ready at the slide.

He hesitated to question that coarse man, even to mention Ida May Bostwick's name to him. The waiter had misinterpreted his first remark about the waitresses. The proprietor might hold any question he asked regarding Ida May against the record of the violet-eyed girl, if by any wild possibility that should be her name. There was time still, he

thought, to find her at her lodgings before she started for the restaurant, if she worked here.

So Tunis paid his check and strode forth. The lodging of Ida May Bostwick was not in this neighborhood, of course, not even in the West End. In fact, it was in the South End, in one of those streets running more or less parallel to lower Shawmut Avenue. He took a car in the subway and got off near the address Prudence Ball had given him.

To the mind of the Cape man, used as he was to the open spaces of both sea and land, these dingy blocks of brick houses, three and four stories in height, all quite alike in smoke and squalor and even in the pattern of the net curtains at their parlor windows, made as dreary a picture as he had ever imagined. He thought of that pale, slender, violet-eyed girl coming back to this ugly block at night, after long hours at the restaurant, having to look forward to nothing more beautiful, in all probability, inside the house where she lodged. Who would not be glad, overjoyed, indeed, to get away from such an environment?

He found the number. The house was no worse and no better than its neighbors. By stains on the blistered bricks beside the door frame he gathered that scraps of paper advertising empty rooms had often been pasted there. He rang the bell at the top of the rail-guarded steps. After a time he rang again.

He could hear the bell jangle somewhere in a distant part of the house. Nobody came in answer to his summons, not even after his third ring. At length the creaking, iron-barred gate in the area warned him that the main door at which he rang was not in use at that hour of the day. A woman in a house dress as ugly as the street itself, and with untidy gray hair and a bar of smut on her cheek, craned her neck from this opening to look up at him.

"There's no use your ringing. I ain't got an empty room, young man," she announced.

He descended spryly into the area before she could close the gate. Her near-sighted scowl misjudged him again, for she added:

"Nor I don't want to buy anything."

"One moment, ma'am," he cried. "I have nothing for sale. I'd like to see somebody who lodges here."

"Who?" asked the woman, peering at him curiously.

"Miss Bostwick."

"You'll have to come this evening."

"Oh! She has—has gone to work already?"

"My stars! Do you know what time it is, young man?" demanded the lodging-house keeper. "It's after ten o'clock."

Already Tunis Latham's hopes began to sink.

"Then—then she goes to work early?"

"Lemme tell you, them that works for Hoskin & Marl have to show up by eight or they lose their jobs."

"And she will not be in until evening?" he repeated.

"'Bout seven. She gets her supper before she comes home. I don't give meals."

"Where is this place she works at?" asked the captain of the *Seamew*, with a suppressed sigh.

"Guess you are a stranger in town, aren't you?" said the curious landlady. "I thought everybody knew Hoskin & Marl's. It's on Tremont Street. The big department store."

"Oh! Miss Bostwick works there?"

"In the laces. You can't know her very well, young man."

"I come from her folks down on the Cape," he thought it his duty to explain. "I've a message for her."

"On the Cape? My stars! I never knowed she had any country relatives. Are they rich? They ain't died and left her a fortune, have they?" were the eager questions.

"The ones I speak of are still alive," Tunis said gravely, backing up the steps to the sidewalk. "Thank you, ma'am. I'll go to that store and speak to her there. Thank you."

Before she could evolve another question, Tunis had escaped. He walked smartly away, not only to

outdistance the lodging-house keeper's voice, but because he was confused and disappointed. Ida May Bostwick could not work in a department store and in an eating house as well. Of course not! And now that this point was an established fact in his mind, he admitted that he had been utterly foolish to imagine for a moment that he had already met her, that she was the violet-eyed girl in whom he had taken an interest.

Right at the start he had known that a girl working in an eating house like that was not the sort of person he could introduce to Aunt Lucretia. And so why had he imagined that she would prove to be the great-niece of Prudence Ball? It was ridiculous!

Of course, this Ida May came of good Cape stock. At least, on one side of her family. The Honeys were as good as the Lathams or the Balls.

Thus condemning his foolish fancies he strode downtown again. He knew where Hoskin & Marl's was. He had been in the place. When he reached the department store he marched straight in, meaning to have an immediate interview with the girl at the lace counter.

CHAPTER VI

AN UNSATISFACTORY INTERVIEW

TUNIS LATHAM suffered all the timidity of the average man when he got into the maze of that department store. There is a psychological reason for the haberdashery goods, the line for the mere male, being placed always within sight of a principal exit. The catacombs of Rome would be no more terrifying in prospect for a man than a venture into the farther intricacies of Hoskin & Marl's.

The captain of the *Seamew* could box the compass with the next seafarer, but he lost all idea of the points on the card before he had been three minutes in the store, and he had to hail a floorwalker to get his bearings.

"Lace counter? Right this way, sir. Yes, sir. Just over there. Our—er—Miss Bostwick will serve you, sir. Forward!"

The wind and sun had heightened Tunis Latham's naturally florid complexion to about as deep a red

as can easily be imagined, but he felt the back of his neck and his ears burning as he approached the counter to which he was directed. A girl had detached herself from a group at the farther end, and now came toward him. All that he first saw clearly, however, was a pair of eyes staring at him from behind the counter. They were not violet eyes.

The girl who owned those twinkling, needle-sharp eyes was nothing like that girl he had been thinking of so much since his previous visit to Boston. She was rather small, dressed in the extreme mode in a cheap way, wearing a tawdry gilt chain, several rings, and a wrist watch. There was something about her which reminded Tunis very strongly of the girls of Portygee Town, although she was a pronounced blonde.

Her hair was really her only attractive possession. Those sharp brown eyes did not please Tunis Latham at all. And there was a certain smart boldness in her manner, too, which caused him a distinct feeling of repugnance.

He plunged into his errand with all the boldness that a bashful man usually displays when he finally gets his courage to the sticking point.

"You are Miss Bostwick?" he asked.

"What kind of lace—goodness! Who are you?" asked the girl, her stilted, saleslady manner changing to amazement with surprising suddenness.

"I live at Big Wreck Cove. I guess you've heard of it," said Tunis.

"Big Wreck Cove? Do tell!" Her eyes danced. "You're from down on the Cape, then. I guess you want some lace for your wife. What kind did she send you for?"

Tunis brushed this aside bluntly.

"I don't want any lace," he told her. "I come from your aunt, Mrs. Ira Ball."

"My aunt? Fancy!"

"She has heard about you," went on Tunis. "I guess she thought a heap of your mother. She—she'd like to see you, Mrs. Ball would."

The girl patted her hair into place with a languid hand. Her lips parted in a teasing smile. This "hick" really amused her.

"Just to think! Would she?" she drawled. "Is she in town?"

"Who? Mrs. Ball? I should say not. She's down at Big Wreck Cove, I tell you."

"Oh, really? I thought by the way you spoke she was outside—in her car." She tossed her head with that same tantalizing smile, almost a grimace. "What did you want to tell me?"

Tunis realized that he could not talk to her here, after all. The idle girls at the end of the counter were already whispering, and their smiles were poignant javelins of ridicule. The captain of the *Seamew* knew that he was far beyond his depth.

"Where can I talk to you?" he asked.

"I get away for my lunch hour in a few minutes. I could talk to you then. But us girls ain't supposed to entertain our friends at the counter." She flashed him another amused and quite comprehending glance.

"I've a message for you from Aunt Prue and the captain. Captain Ira Ball. He's her husband," explained Tunis jerkily.

"Oh, really? Mr. Judson is coming this way." She flirted open a card of cheap lace lying on the counter. "Won't this do, sir?"

"Cat's foot! I don't want any lace," growled the captain of the *Seamew*.

"And I don't want to lose my job," rejoined the girl sharply.

"Where'll I meet you so we can talk?"

"At twelve forty-five," hissed the girl out of the corner of her mouth, beginning to wind up the lace again. "Back entrance to the store." Then, aloud: "Sorry, sir. We haven't any cheaper quality in that pattern."

He knew she was ridiculing him. He was cognizant, however, of the department head's hard stare and the amused glances of the other saleswomen. He strode out of the store, and on the sidewalk halted to mop his face and neck with a blue-bordered handkerchief.

"She's as sassy as a chipmunk. I declare! What

would Cap'n Ira and Aunt Prue do with a girl like her around the house? And the way she's dressed!"

In his mind the idea germinated that he would be doing a far better thing if he did not go around to the employees' door and wait for Ida May Bostwick. What sort of life would she lead the two old people down there on Wreckers' Head? He actually shrank from being a party to such an arrangement.

Not for a moment did he think that Miss Bostwick might not jump at the chance to change her place of residence from a South End lodging house to the Ball homestead overlooking Big Wreck Cove and the sea. He had seen that she was afraid of her boss in the store. The rules there must be very strict. He had noted that everything about the girl, her apparel and her ornaments, was cheap and tawdry. She must be both poor and unhappy. Why should she not jump at the chance of bettering herself?

What would Cap'n Ira say when he caught his first glimpse of that painted and powdered face? How could good Aunt Prue take to her heart the bold, jeering shopgirl, evidently born and bred as far from the old standards of Cape Cod breeding as could be imagined? No matter how fine a girl Sarah Honey was, her daughter was of a cheap city type.

But Tunis Latham did not stand in the position

of a judge. He had not been told to use his powers of observation before placing the Balls' offer before Ida May Bostwick. He had no discretion in the matter at all.

So he went around to the street behind Hoskin & Marl's at the required time and spent five or ten minutes backed up against a blank wall under the sharp scrutiny of every girl who hurried out of the big store on her way to lunch. Ida May came, at last.

Tunis Latham in his go-ashore uniform and cap was no unsightly figure. A stern tranquillity of countenance lent him dignity. He attracted a certain respect wherever he went, but, as has been said, there was nothing harsh in his appearance.

The girl gave him an appraising scrutiny as she walked toward him. While covering those few yards she made up her mind about Tunis on several points. One was that she would not lunch this noon at any cafeteria or automat!

"Really," she said, with downcast glance, as the man got into step beside her, "I don't feel that I know you well enough to talk to you at all, Mister —Mister——"

"My name's Tunis Latham. I'm owner and skipper of the schooner *Seamew*. I live right handy to your uncle and aunt."

"Goodness! You don't mean I've got an uncle

and aunt down there on the Cape? I never heard of them."

"They are your great-uncle and great-aunt. Aunt Prue must have been your mother's own aunt."

"So you are my Cousin—er—Tunis?"

His face flamed and he did not look at her.

"That doesn't follow," he said. "Aunt Prue is my aunt only in a manner of speaking. But she is your blood relation."

"Yes? I suppose she's a dear old soul?"

"They are mighty nice folks," Tunis replied stoutly. "As nice as any in all Barnstable County."

"But—er—sort of simple?"

The girl asked it with a perfectly innocent countenance. Tunis flashed her a look that showed comprehension.

"Just about as simple as I am," he said.

"Oh!"

"Where'll we go to eat?" he asked cheerfully, considering that he had the best of it so far.

They came out upon Tremont Street and now started downtown. He desired to get no nearer to that eating house on Scollay Square. At least, not with his present companion.

"There's the Barquette," said Miss Bostwick, with the air of one used daily to the grandeur of such hostelries.

But Tunis had seen her lodgings! However, her

airs amused him, and Tunis Latham was no penny squeezer. He headed straight in for the dining room, where a gloriously appareled negro head waiter appraised him as being "all right," and Ida May got by, without knowing it, upon the captain's substantial appearance.

While the waiter was away, Tunis bluntly put his errand before her. He felt it his duty to make the offer as attractive as possible. But he did not make small the fact that the Balls were old and needed her services.

"Goodness! What do they want me for—a nurse?" she demanded tartly.

The question put Tunis on his mettle. He explained that Cap'n Ira and his wife were comfortably "fixed," as Cape people considered comfort, with a home free and clear of all encumbrances, and investments that yielded a sufficient support. Ida May, as he understood it, would share their home and their means.

"And you want I should go down to that place and live on pollack and potatoes till them folks die, for the sake of just a *home?*" she demanded, her brown eyes snapping.

"*I* don't want you to do anything," he pointed out coolly enough. "I am merely repeating their offer. They are your folks."

"And I know all about what it is down there," the girl said quickly. "My mother came from there.

She was glad enough to get away, too, I warrant. Why should I give up a good job and the city to live in such a dead-and-alive hole?"

"That is for you to decide," Tunis replied, not without secret relief.

He could not understand her attitude. He remembered that South End lodging house with secret horror. But evidently Ida May Bostwick was wedded to the tawdry conveniences and gayeties of city life. Tunis could not wholly understand why any sane person should assume this attitude; in fact, he suspected a good deal of it was put on. How could a girl, even one as inconsequential and flighty as Ida May evidently was, hold in contempt the offer he had brought her from Cap'n Ira and his wife?

But he had done all that could be expected of him. All, indeed, that he thought wise. Disappointed as the old couple would be by Ida May's refusal, Tunis felt that to urge her to reconsider the matter would not be in the best interests of her elderly relatives. They needed a young companion there on Wreckers' Head, needed one very sorely, but not such a person as Ida May Bostwick.

"Then, that will be your final answer, Miss Bostwick?" he said slowly, as Ida May played with her ice.

"Say! I wouldn't go down to that hole for a million," scoffed the girl. "I guess you wouldn't

stand it yourself, only you're off on your ship most of the time."

"I like the Cape," he said briefly.

"Never lived in the city, did you?"

"I never did."

"Then you don't know any better," she told him confidently. "And you don't really look like such a dead one, at that."

"Thank you."

She smiled saucily into his rather grim face. Then she opened her bag and deliberately powdered her nose before rising from the table.

"Thanks for a pleasant hour," she drawled. "You tell Auntie and Uncle Josh to get a girl from the poor farm or somewhere to do their chores and tuck 'em in nights. *Me,* I don't mean to live out of sight of movie signs and electric lights. I'd like to see myself!"

She was both rude and common. Tunis was glad to get out of the dining room. Ida May attracted altogether too much attention. And she had quite openly eyed his well-lined wallet when he paid the waiter. To a girl like Ida May, all was fish that swam into her net. Crude as she considered him, Tunis Latham was a man with some money. And he evidently knew how to spend it.

"When you're in town I'd be glad to see you any time, Mr. Latham. Or do I say captain?"

She smiled up at the big, broad-shouldered fellow

bravely as she trotted along in the skirt that made her hobble like a cripple. The captain of the *Seamew* did not respond very cordially, and quite overlooked her personal question.

"I don't expect to spend much time in Boston," he said. "Thank you. Then I shall report to Aunt Prue and Cap'n Ira that you will not consider their offer at all?"

"I should say not!" She laughed lightly. "You don't know, I guess, what we girls expect nowadays, if we give up our independence."

"Independence!" snorted Tunis.

"That's what I said," rejoined Ida May tartly. "When the store closes my time's my own. I can do as I please. And I've got nobody to please but myself. Oh, you don't understand at all, Captain Latham!"

He said no more. Nor did he escort her farther than the corner. There he lifted his cap and took her offered hand. Although it was beringed and the nails were stained and polished, Tunis could not help noticing that Ida May's hand was not altogether clean.

"Well, au revoir, captain!" she said lightly. "I hope I see you again."

He bowed silently and watched her depart. The sunshine glinted gloriously upon her fluffy hair.

"Fool's gold," he muttered.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE RESTAURANT

THE captain of the *Seamew* found himself facing an unpleasant problem. How could he make the Balls, either Cap'n Ira or Prudence, understand the kind of girl Ida May was? How could he even bring them to understand that nothing he could have said would have ever made Ida May Bostwick see the situation in its true light?

Why, the old couple could never be made to believe that a girl in her sane senses would turn down cold such a proposition as they had made. They would suspect that he had failed to put it to her in the proper light. His "errand of mercy," as Cap'n Ira had called it, had seemed so reasonable for both sides!

Tunis realized that he had not overurged the matter to the girl. But there was a reason for that. The difficulty would be in explaining to the Balls just how unsuitable Ida May was. They would

never believe that the daughter of Sarah Honey could be such a cheap and inconsequential person as she had actually proved to be.

"It's going to hit 'em 'twixt wind and water, and hit 'em hard," muttered the captain of the *Seamew*. "One thing that girl said was right, I guess. They'd better get somebody from the poor farm, rather than take her into their house. Such a creature would be happier with the Balls, and make them happier. But it's pretty tough when those of your own blood go back on you."

The experience had left a bad taste in Tunis Latham's mouth. He hoped heartily that he would never see Ida May Bostwick again. He never intended to if he could help it. To take his mind off the fiasco entirely, he hopped on to a car and rode out to the art museum and spent the afternoon in the quiet galleries where the masters, little and great, are hung.

He came downtown at nightfall, threading the paths of the public gardens and the common malls of Charles and Beacon Streets, with a feeling of immense calm in his soul. Tunis Latham possessed keenly contrasting attributes of character. On the one hand he was of a rather practical mind and thought; on the other, his love of beauty and appreciation of nature's greater forces might have made of him an artist under more liberal conditions of birth and breeding.

Ida May Bostwick had rasped all the finer feelings of the captain of the *Seamew*. He was happy to be able to get her out of his mind. In fact, he had put aside thought of any girl. Romance no longer enmeshed his cogitations. He was utterly calm, unruffled, serene, as he descended by the twists and turns of certain streets beyond the State House and came out finally upon the now lighted and bustling square.

He halted, like a pointer dog, before the eating place where he had had breakfast.

Tunis Latham felt a certain shock. That girl with the violet eyes had been farthest from his thought at the moment, and for some hours now. He had lumped together the whole girl question and had relegated it to the back of his mind.

And perhaps he was cured. He looked at it more sensibly after the first moment. It was not thought of the girl that had brought him here. Habit is strong in most of us. The urge of a healthy appetite was more likely what had caused him to halt before the restaurant door.

It was after seven. Following his walk from the Back Bay it was little wonder that he was hungry. But should he enter this place? There were several other restaurants in sight of about the same standard. Tunis Latham did not make a practice of patronizing places similar to the Barquette when he ate alone.

To pass on and enter another restaurant would be to confess weakness. He really cared nothing about that girl with the violet eyes. She very probably was no better and no worse than Ida May Bostwick. All these city shopgirls were about of a pattern. He had allowed sentiment to sway him for a few hours. But sentiment had received a jolt during his interview with the girl from the lace department of Hoskin & Marl's.

"Cat's foot!" ejaculated the captain of the *Seamew*. "I guess I'm not afraid to take another look at that girl, if she's in here. Probably two looks will be about all I want," and he grinned rather wryly as he approached the door.

The place was well patronized at this hour; and the "lady help" was much in evidence, flying back and forth from tables to slide and "dealing 'em off the arm" with a rapidity and dexterity that was most amazing, Tunis thought. There was even a girl in the cashier's cage, while the black-haired man he had paid his check to that forenoon was walking about with a sharp eye for everything that went on.

The Cape man started down the room for an empty seat. Somebody was ahead of him and he backed away. A soft voice, a voice that thrilled Tunis Latham before he saw the speaker at all, said just behind him:

"There is a seat here, sir."

He knew it was she of the violet eyes before he

turned about. It seemed to the seaman the voice matched the beautiful eyes of which he had thought so often during the past few days. They must belong together!

He turned to look at her. She was gathering up the soiled dishes from a table at which was an empty seat. First of all, Tunis secured it. Then he glanced keenly at the girl.

Would she remember him? Had his face and appearance been photographed upon her memory as her face had been printed on his? She did not look at him then. She was busy clearing the enameled top of the table and wiping off the coffee stains and the wet rings made by the water glass.

She had black hair and a great deal of it, deep black, glossy, fine of texture, and very well brushed. Black hair and those velvety violet eyes, the long, black lashes of which were a most delicate fringe! The brows were boldly dashed on against her smooth, almost colorless, but perfect skin. Tunis had never before seen any feminine loveliness the equal of this girl, this waitress in a cheap restaurant! Yet a casual glance would scarcely have discovered much attractive about the girl. Had he not looked so deep into her violet eyes at the instant of their first meeting, perhaps the captain of the *Seamew* would never have given her the second glance. There was a timidity about her, a shrinking in her

very attitude, that would naturally displease even an observant person.

Her nose, mouth, and chin, were only ordinarily well formed. Nothing remarkable at all about them. But the texture of her skin, it seemed to the man, was the finest he had ever beheld. Her figure was slight, but supple. Every line, accentuated by the common black dress she wore, was graceful. Her throat was bare and she wore no ornament. His sharp gaze flashed to her left hand. It was guiltless of any band. He had begun to flush at the thought which prompted this last observation, and grabbed at a stained bill of fare to cover his sudden confusion.

She moved away with the piled-up dishes. His gaze followed her covertly. Even her walk was graceful, not at all the hobble or the jerky pace or the slouch of the other waitresses.

By and by she came back. She brought tableware and a glass of water. She placed them meticulously before him. Then, for the first time it seemed, she looked at Tunis Latham. She halted, her hand still upon the water glass. She quivered all over. The water slopped upon the table.

"Oh, is it you, sir?" she said in that timid, breathless whisper he so well remembered.

"Good evening," Tunis rejoined. "I hope you are well?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Quite well. What will you have, sir?"

She no longer looked at him. Her gaze was roving about her tables, but more often fixed upon the broad, alpaca-coated shoulders of the restaurant proprietor at the front of the room.

Tunis ordered almost at random. She repeated the viands named. There was a tiny tendril of her hair that curled low upon her neck at one side, caressing the pale satin sheen of the skin. He felt an overpowering desire to lean forward and press his lips to the tiny curl!

As though she comprehended his secret wish, a wave of color stained her throat and cheeks from the line of her frock to her hair. It poured up under the pallor of the skin, transfiguring her expression ravishingly. Instead of her countenance being rather wan and weary looking, in a moment it became as vivid as a freshly opened flower.

She turned swiftly, departing with his order. Tunis was conscious of a hoarse voice at his elbow. He glanced aside. His neighbor in the next chair was a little, common man, with a little, common face, on which was a little, common leer.

"A pip, I'll tell the world," was the neighbor's comment. "Whadjer s'pose brought her into this dump?"

"The necessity for earning her living," replied Tunis, without looking again at the man.

"With a face like that?" suggested the man, and fell wordless again, but not silent, as he attacked his soup.

If there was an opportunity to speak to the girl again, Tunis could scarcely do so, he thought, for her own sake. It would attract the attention not only of the fellow beside him, but of others.

He felt an overpowering desire, however, to talk with her. His recently born determination to have nothing more to do with any girl had melted like snow in July. That feeling, which had come through his experience with Ida May Bostwick, seemed a sacrilege when he considered this girl.

The man beside him, noisily finishing his soup, ordered apple-meringue pie when the waitress returned with Tunis' order. The latter noted that her fingers still trembled when she placed his food before him. When she brought the pie she reached for the man's check and punched another hole in it. Tunis was careful not to raise his own eyes to her face. But all the time he was trying to invent some way by which he might further his acquaintance with her.

He must be back at the *Seamew* that night. Tomorrow the cargo would come aboard and, wind and tide being ordinarily favorable, the schooner would put to sea as soon as the hatches were battened down. He could not continue to come here to the restaurant for his meals and so grasp the

frail chance of bolstering his acquaintance with the girl. Indeed, he felt that such an obvious course would utterly wreck any chance he might naturally have of knowing her better.

The timidity she evinced was nothing put on. It was real. Its cause he could not fathom, but to Tunis Latham it seemed that this girl with the violet eyes was a gentle girl, if not gently bred, and that she shrank from contact with the rougher elements of life. How she came to be working in this place was not of moment to him. It would not have mattered to Tunis Latham where he had met her or under what circumstances; he only knew that there was a mysterious charm about her which attracted and held his heart captive.

"Will you have anything more, sir?" The low, yet penetrating voice was in his ear. She hovered over his chair and her near presence thrilled him. He had not much more than played with the food. Now he replied briefly, without thinking:

"Apple-meringue."

"Yes, sir."

His neighbor pushed back his chair and got up noisily. He picked up his check, glanced at it, and snorted.

"Hey!" he said to the girl returning with Tunis' pie. "What's this for?"

"Yes, sir?"

"You've rung me up an extry nickel. What's the idea?"

"Fifteen cents for meringue, sir."

"Huh? Who had meringue? I had apple pie, plain apple pie. It's ten cents. This feller"—indicating Tunis—"ordered apple-meringue; not me."

He held out the check for correction belligerently.

"You ordered apple-meringue, sir, and I brought it. You ate it. The check is correct."

Low and timid as the voice was, gently as the words were spoken, Tunis sensed an undercurrent of firmness and determination in the girl's character that he had not before suspected.

"Say, you don't put nothing like that over on me!" exclaimed the man loudly.

Tunis moved in his chair. He saw the black-haired man at the front of the restaurant swing about to face down the room. He had heard this unseemly disturbance.

"I will call the manager."

"And so will I—I'll call him good!" sneered the patron. "He knows that you crooks in here overcharge. He puts you up to it. That's why he hires jailbirds and——"

Tunis had got up, pushed back his chair with his foot, and as the girl uttered a horrified gasp at the rough speech, he seized the man. His grip on the back of the fellow's coat between his shoulders

brought a startled grunt from lips parted to continue his blackguardism.

"Hey! What d'ye mean?" roared the fellow, as Tunis twisted him into the aisle.

"You dog!" said the captain of the *Seamew* in a low voice. "Down on your knees and ask the lady's pardon for that speech!"

The black-haired man started toward them. His coarse face had a smile on it as vicious as the snarl of a tiger. He put up his hand in a gesture of command.

"Beg her pardon!" repeated Tunis, and by the great weight of his hand crushed the squalling patron of the restaurant to his knees before the terrified girl.

"Stop that! What do you mean?" cried the manager of the restaurant, still several yards away.

The patrons of the place had been thinning out for the last few minutes. Most of those remaining were near the front. Some of the waitresses were already seated at a table next to the kitchen slide, eating their suppers.

"Take him off me!" roared the man squirming on the floor under Tunis Latham's hand. "That thief of a girl set him on me. This is a nice thing, be overcharged and then assaulted!"

He was talking for the benefit of the black-haired man. The latter swooped down upon them. His face was purple with wrath and his fat jowls trembled.

"Let him up! Do you hear me?" he exclaimed.

"He insulted this lady," said Tunis, indicating the waitress. "You just heard him repeat it. He'll beg her pardon or I'll wring his neck."

"What do you mean?" cried the restaurant man. "What's the girl to you? One of her friends, are you? Well, you are doing her no good with me, I assure you."

The captain of the *Seamew* flung the little man face down upon the floor and held him there with his foot while he reached with both hands for the proprietor. He got him. The latter uttered a squeak like a captured rat.

"You're another of the same breed, are you?" Tunis demanded. "You'll beg her pardon, too, or I'll crack the heads of the two of you together! Come!"

He stood the man on his feet before the waitress with such force that his teeth rattled. He stooped and yanked the other to an upright posture likewise. The shrinking girl, Tunis noticed, was not weeping. She looked at all he did as though she approved. The other girls were shrieking. The cashier had run to the door and cried into the street for the police. But that violet-eyed girl, timid as she naturally was, did not open her lips.

"She's a plucky little lady," thought Tunic Latham. "But somebody's got to stand up for her."

CHAPTER VIII

SHEILA

THE captain of the *Seamew* held the two struggling, cursing men as though they were small boys. His eyes flamed a question at the girl. She understood and nodded, if ever so faintly.

"I ought to send both of you to the hospital," said Tunis in a grim voice. "But I'm satisfied if you beg her pardon and let her go." This to the restaurant proprietor.

The man opened his lips to emit something besides an apology, although the smaller man was already quelled. But the look in Tunis Latham's face made the black-haired man pause.

"Well, she can't cause a disturbance here. But I meant no offense."

The smaller man hastened to add:

"So help me! I was that mad I didn't know what I said. I didn't mean nothing."

Tunis nodded solemnly.

"Get your coat and hat, miss," he said. "I guess it won't be a pleasant place for you to work in after this."

She slipped away. Tunis let the men go. They both stepped away from him, panting, relaxing their shoulders, eyeing the young captain with as much curiosity as apprehension.

Suddenly there was an added commotion at the front door. Tunis saw a policeman enter. The coarse-featured proprietor of the restaurant instantly recovered all his courage.

"This way, officer! This way!" he cried. "Here's the man."

At that moment Tunis felt a tug at his coat. He flashed a glance over his shoulder. It was the girl. She wore a little hat pulled down over all that black hair, and she was buttoning a shabby jacket. There was a way out by the alley; he well knew it. Nor was he anxious of appearing before either a police lieutenant or a magistrate for creating a disturbance in the place.

"Run along. I'll be right behind you," he whispered.

The policeman was some distance, and several tables away. Tunis looked to see if all was clear. The girl was just passing through the swinging door into the kitchen. Tunis stepped back, turned suddenly, while the restaurant proprietor was making

ready to address the policeman, and leaped for the rear exit.

"There he goes!" squealed the patron who had been the cause of the trouble.

But nobody stopped Tunis Latham. At a flash, when he got into the kitchen, he saw the girl opening the outer door. The way was clear. He crossed the room in several quick strides and caught up with her. The startled chef and his assistants merely stared.

The alley was empty, but they walked swiftly away from the square. The arc lamp on the corner which they approached sputtered continuously, like soda water bubbling out of a bottle. He looked down at her curiously in the flickering illumination from this lamp and found the girl looking up at him just as curiously.

"That was an unwise thing to do. You might have been arrested," she said, ever so gently. Then she added: "And it has cost me my job."

"That is the only thing that worries me," he rejoined promptly.

"You need not mind, sir. I really am not sorry. I could not have stood it much longer. And Mr. Sellers paid yesterday."

"So they don't owe you much on account, then," Tunis said soberly. "I came away without paying for my dinner. I'll pay the worth of my check to you; that'll help some."

For the first time she laughed. Once he had sat all afternoon in a gully back of Big Wreck Cove in the pine woods and listened to the cheerful gurgle of a spring bubbling from under a stone. That silvery chuckle was repeated in this girl's laugh With all her timidity and shyness, she was naturally a cheerful body. That laugh was quite involuntary.

"I think I may be able to get along," she said, with that quiet tone of finality which Tunis felt would keep the boldest man at a distance. "It is difficult, however, to get a position without references."

"I'll go back and wring one out of him—when the cop has gone," grinned Tunis.

"I don't think a reference from Mr. Sellers would do me much good," she sighed. "But at the time I took the place I was quite desperate."

The captain of the *Seamew* made no comment. They were walking up the hill through a quiet street. Of course, there was no pursuit. But the young man began to feel that he might have done the girl more harm than good by espousing her cause in the restaurant. Perhaps he had been too impulsive.

"You—you can find other and more pleasant work, I am sure," he said with hesitation. "I hope you will forgive me for thrusting myself into your concerns, but I really could not stand for that man backing up your customer instead of you. He did order meringue pie. I heard him."

She smiled, and he caught the faint flicker of it as it curved her lips and made her eyes shine for an instant. Minute following minute, she was becoming more attractive. His voice trembled when he spoke again:

"I—I hope you will forgive me."

"You did just what I should have expected my brother to do, if I had a brother," she replied frankly. "But few girls who work at Sellers' have brothers."

"No?" Something in her voice, rather than in the words, startled Tunis.

"Let me put it differently," she said, still with that gentle cadence which ameliorated the bitterness of her tone. "Girls who have brothers seldom fall into Sellers' clutches. You see, he is a last resort. He does not demand references, and he poses as a philanthropist."

Tunis felt confused, in a maze. He could not imagine where the girl was tacking. He was keenly aware, however, that there was a mystery about her being employed at all in Sellers' restaurant.

They came out at last upon the brow of the hill overlooking the Common. The lamps glimmered along Tremont Street through an opalescent haze which was stealing over the city from the bay. Without question they went down the steps side by side. There was a bench in a shadow and, without touching her, Tunis steered the girl's steps toward it.

She sat down with an involuntary sigh of weariness. She had been on her feet most of the time since eleven o'clock. She relaxed in contact with the back of the bench, and he could see the contour of her throat and chin thrown up in relief against the background of shadow. The whole relaxed attitude of her slim body betrayed exhaustion.

"I hope you will not blame me too severely," Tunis stammered.

"I don't blame you."

"I fear you will after you have taken time to think it over. But—but perhaps there may be some way in which I can repair the damage I have done."

She looked at him levelly, curiously.

"You are a seaman, are you not?"

"I'm Tunis Latham. I own the schooner *Seamew,* and command her. We are going to run back and forth from Boston to the Cape—Cape Cod."

"Oh! I could scarcely fill a position on your schooner, Captain Latham."

She smiled again. It was a weary smile, however, not like the former flash of amusement she had shown. Her head drooped as her mind sank into unhappy retrospection. Tunis looked aside at her with a great hunger in his heart to take all her trouble—no matter what it was—upon his own mind and give her the freedom she needed. What or who the girl was did not matter. Even what she had

done, or what she had not done meant little to Tunis Latham.

She was the one girl in all this world who had ever interested him beyond a passing moment, and he was convinced that she alone would ever interest him. The cheap environment of their meeting meant nothing. If she was free, her own mistress, and he could get her, he meant to make this girl his wife.

"You didn't tell me your name," he said directly. "Won't you? I have been frank with you."

"Why, so you have," said the girl. There might have been a strata of laughter underlying the words; yet her face was sober enough. "If you really wish to know, Captain Latham, my name is Macklin."

"*Miss* Macklin?" he asked, a positive tremor in his voice.

"Certainly. Sheila Macklin, spinster."

Tunis drew a long breath. That was enough! He would take his chance in the game with any other man as long as she was not promised. But there was no use in spoiling everything by being too precipitate. The captain of the *Seamew* might be simple, but he was not the man to ruin a thing through impulsiveness. That exhibition in the restaurant was hooked up with wrath.

There had been an undercurrent of thought in his mind ever since he had met this girl for the second time, and it was quite a natural thought,

comparing her with Ida May Bostwick. If Sheila Macklin had only been Ida May, after all! It was a ridiculous idea. Not a feature or betrayed trait of character was like any that the disappointing great-niece of Prudence Ball possessed. This girl sitting beside Tunis on the bench and Ida May Bostwick were as little alike as though they were inhabitants of two different worlds.

He had begun to imagine, too, how well this girl beside him would fit into the needs of the old couple living there alone on Wreckers' Head. It was an idle thought, of course. He had no plan, or scheme, or definite suggestion in his mind. It was only a wish, a keen longing for an impossible conjunction of circumstances which would have enabled him to present Sheila Macklin to Cap'n Ira and Prudence and say:

"This is the girl you sent me for."

"Just what will you do now that you have lost that job, Miss Macklin?" Tunis asked abruptly.

"Oh, after I am rested, I will go home!"

He had a sudden flash of the memory of that stark lodging house where Ida May Bostwick lived, and he felt assured this girl's home could be no better. But he did not mention this thought.

"I did not mean it just that way," he told her, smiling. "First you and I will go and get supper somewhere. I did not half finish mine, and you have had none at all."

"I don't know about that," she interposed. "It is generous of you. But ought I to accept?"

"You need not question that. We are going to be friends, Miss Macklin. Is it necessary for me to bring you references?"

"It may be necessary for me to obtain a sponsor," she said, quite seriously. "You do not know a thing about me, Captain Latham."

"You know nothing about me, except what I have told you." And he laughed.

"And what I read in your countenance," she said soberly.

He grinned at her, but rather ruefully.

"I never knew my thoughts were advertised in my face."

"Oh, no! Not that! But your character is. Otherwise I would not be sitting here with you."

"I guess that's all right then," he declared with satisfaction. "Well, let's call it a draw. If you take me at face value, I'll take you at the same rating. Anyhow, we can risk going to supper together."

"Well, somewhere to a quiet place. Don't take me where you are known, Captain Latham."

"No?" He was puzzled again. "But, then, I am not known anywhere in Boston."

"All the better. I ought not to lend myself in any way to making you possible future trouble."

"I do not understand you, Miss Macklin."

He sat up suddenly on the bench to look at her more sharply. There was an underlying, but important, meaning to her speech.

"I know you do not understand," she rejoined gently. She sighed. "I must make you clearly see just who I am and the risk you run in associating with me."

"The risk I run!"

He uttered the words in both amazement and ridicule.

"You do not quite understand, Captain Latham," she repeated in the same gentle tone.

There was no raillery in her voice now. She was altogether serious. Her eyes, luminous, yet darkly unfathomable, were held full upon his face. He felt rather than saw that she was under a mental strain. The revelation she was about to make throbbed in her voice when she spoke again.

"You do not quite understand. Sellers gives girls work in his restaurant who could by no possibility offer proper references, girls from the Protectory, from homes, as they are called; some, even, who have served jail sentences. I had been two years in the St. Andrew's School for Girls when I went to work for Sellers."

CHAPTER IX

A GIRL'S STORY

THERE was a ringing in Tunis Latham's ears. As you make Paulmouth Harbor coming from seaward, on a thick day you hear the insistent tolling of the bell buoy over Bitter Reef. That was the distant, but incessant sound that the captain of the *Seamew* seemed to hear as he sat on that bench on Boston Common beside this strange girl.

Without being a prig, Tunis Latham was undeniably a good man. Whether he was altogether a wise man was perhaps a subject for argument. At least, his future conduct must settle that point.

But for the moment, when Sheila Macklin had made her last statement, it seemed that every atom of thought and all ability to consider matters logically were drained out of the man's mind. That mind was perfectly blank. What the girl had said seemed mere sound, sound without meaning. He could not grasp its significance.

And yet he knew it was tragic. It was something that had made the girl what she was. It explained all Tunis had been unable heretofore to understand about Sheila Macklin That timidity, that whispering shyness, the shrinking from observation and from any attention, were all explained. She had suffered persecution and punishment, harsh and undeserved, that made her recoil from contact with other more fortunate people. She felt herself outcast, ostracized, and was unable to defend herself from malign fortune.

Gradually Tunis regained his usual self-control.

If Sheila had said anything following the bare statement that she had spent two years in the St. Andrew's Reformatory for Women, he had not comprehended it. Nor could he have told how long he sat silent on the bench getting control of his voice and of his tongue. When he did speak he said quite casually:

"And what kind of a place is that—er—school, Miss Macklin?"

"You can imagine. It harbors the weak-minded, the vicious, and the unfortunate runaway girls, thieves' consorts, and women of the streets. It is, I think, a little like hell, if there really is such a place, Captain Latham."

The poignancy of expression in her voice and words made the man tremble. And yet she did not speak bitterly nor angrily. Her feeling was beyond

all passion. It was the expression of a soul that had suffered everything and could no longer feel. That was just it, Tunis told himself. It explained her attitude, even the tone of her voice. She had endured and seen so much misery and heartache that there seemed nothing left for her to experience.

"Can you bear to tell me what misfortune took you to that place?" he asked gently, yet fighting down all the time that desire to roar with rage.

"Why do you not say 'crime,' Captain Latham?" she asked in that same low, strained voice.

"Because I know that crime and you could not be associated, Miss Macklin," he said hoarsely.

At that she began suddenly to weep. Not aloud, but with her hands pressed over her eyes and her shoulders, shaking with long, shuddering sobs which betrayed how the horror of past thoughts and experiences controlled her when once she gave way. Tunis Latham could have behaved like a madman. That berserk rage that had seized him in the restaurant welled up in his heart now. He gripped the back of the bench till the slat cracked. But there was no opponent here upon whom he could vent his violence that he longed to express.

"Don't cry! For God's sake, don't cry!" he whispered hoarsely. "I know it was all a mistake. It must have been a mistake. How could anybody have been so wicked, so utterly senseless, as to be-

lieve you guilty of—of—what did they accuse you of?"

"Stealing," whispered the girl.

"'Stealing?' What nonsense!"

He put a wealth of disdain into the words. She sat up straighter. She dropped her hands from her face and looked at him. Dark as it was on the bench, he could see that her expression was one of wonder.

"Do—do you really feel that way about it, Captain Latham?"

"It is ridiculous!" he acclaimed heartily.

She sighed. Her momentary animation fell and she spoke again:

"It did not seem ridiculous to the police or to the magistrate. I worked in a store. A piece of sterling silverware disappeared. Other pieces had previously been stolen. The police traced the last missing piece to a pawnshop. The pawnbroker testified that a girl pawned it. His identification of me was close enough to satisfy the judge."

"My God!"

"I was what they call a first offender. At least, I had no police record. Ordinarily I might have been let go under suspended sentence or been put on probation. But I had nobody to say a good word for me. I had been in Boston only a year, and I could not let people where I came from know about my trouble. Even if the judge had

given me a jail sentence, I could have shortened it by good behavior. He did what he thought was best, I suppose. He considered me a hardened young criminal. He sent me to the St. Andrew's School until I was twenty-one—two years. Two long, long years.

"Six months ago I got out and Sellers gave me a job. Now, that is all, Captain Latham. You will readily see my position. I do not want to go anywhere with you to eat where your friends are likely to see you."

He uttered a sudden, stinging, harsh sound; then he removed his cap and bent toward her.

"But what you have said—— Why, were they all crazy? Couldn't they see that such a thing would be impossible for you? Impossible!"

She put a hand gently on his arm to quiet his excitement, for others were passing. Her eyes glowed up into his for an instant. Her lips parted in a happier smile than he had seen on them before.

"Then you will not get up from this bench, Captain Latham, and excuse yourself? I should not blame you if you did so."

"Do you think I'm that kind of a fellow?" he demanded bluntly.

"I—I told you I thought I had quite read your character in your face. But that is no reason why I should take advantage of your kindness to do you harm."

"Harm? How do you mean, 'harm?' "

"Sheila Macklin is a creature from a reformatory. She has been sentenced by a magistrate. She was arrested by the police. She was accused by her employers of theft, and the theft was proved. If any of your friends should see you with me, and I should be identified as the Sheila Macklin who was sentenced for stealing——"

"Cat's foot!" ejaculated Tunis with a sudden reversion to his usual cheerful manner. "Are you going through the rest of your life feeling like that?"

"Why shouldn't I? I am always expecting somebody to see and recognize me. Even in Sellers' place. That man this evening, when he called me 'jailbird' ——"

"I wish I had wrung his neck!" exclaimed the captain of the *Seamew* heartily.

"I appreciate your kindness." Her eyes twinkled. For a moment he caught a glimpse of what Sheila Macklin must have been before tragedy had come into her life. "You are a good, kind man, Captain Latham."

"You just look on me as though I were your brother," he said sturdily. "You are not going to be alone any more, not really. If you had had friends before, when it happened, somebody to speak for you, I am sure nothing like what did happen to you could have happened."

"I come of respectable people," she said quietly. "But they are all dead. I was an orphan before I came to Boston. The friends I had in the little inland town I came from would not have understood. They did not approve of my coming to the city at all. Oh, I wish I had not come!"

"And now you ought not to stay here. Should you?"

"What can I do? I must support myself. I cannot go back. I could not explain those two years. Yet I am always expecting somebody to make inquiry for Sheila Macklin. And then I cannot conceal my story longer."

He nodded thoughtfully. It seemed that, once she had opened the dam of speech, she was glad to talk about herself and her trouble.

"I do hate the city. I have been so unhappy here. If I were only a man I would start right out into the country. I would tramp until I found a place to work. You don't know what it means to be a girl, Captain Latham, and be in trouble."

"I guess all city girls aren't alike after all," he said with a short laugh. Then he looked at her keenly again. "Do you know what sort of an errand brought me up into the city from T-Wharf to-day?"

"What errand? I cannot imagine."

"There are two old people down on the Cape that I am much interested in. They live near my home."

He told her quietly, yet with earnestness, about Cap'n Ira and Prudence. He described their home and their need of some young person to live with them, somebody who would not only help them, but who would love to help them. Then he related, perhaps rather tartly, his experience with Ida May Bostwick.

"What a foolish girl!" she breathed. "And she would not accept a chance like that?"

"Lucky for Cap'n Ira and for Aunt Prue that she won't take up with their offer," he said grimly. "But I dread taking back word to them about her. It will be hard to make them understand. And then, they need the help a good girl could give them."

"Captain Latham, if I only had a chance like that!" she exclaimed. "I'd work my fingers to the bone for a home like that, for shelter, and kindness, and—and—oh, well, some girls have all the best of it, I guess!"

She sighed. It was half a sob. He saw her hands clasp tightly before her in the dusk. The gesture was like a prayer. He knew that her pale face was flushed with earnestness. He cleared his throat.

"You have the chance, if you want it, Miss Macklin," he said.

CHAPTER X

THE PLOT

THERE was a long minute of utter silence following Tunis Latham's last words. Then the girl's whisper, tense, yet shaking like a frightened child's:

"You do not know what you are saying."

"I know exactly what I am saying," he replied.

"They—they would not have me."

"They will welcome you—gladly."

"Never! I am a stranger. They must be told all about me. They could never welcome Sheila Macklin."

He knew that. He knew it only too well. She was just the sort of girl to make Cap'n Ira Ball and Prudence happy, to bring to their latter years the comfort and joy the old couple should have. But the Puritanism which, after all, ingrained their characters would never allow the Balls to welcome a girl with the stain Sheila Macklin bore upon her name. Tunis remembered clearly how scornfully Cap'n Ira

had spoken of the possibility of their taking in a girl from the poor farm. Pride of family and of name is inbred in their class of New Englanders.

The old people wanted a girl whom they could love and look upon as their own. They would welcome nobody else. They had set their minds and hearts upon Ida May Bostwick. The fact that Ida May failed to come up to their expectations, that she was perfectly worthless and inconsequential, did not open the way for another girl to be substituted for Ida May. Possibly Tunis might be successful in an attempt to interest the Balls in Sheila Macklin's case. But the girl did not want charity, not charity as the word is used in its general and harsher sense.

Should she carry with her wherever she went this name which had been so smirched—the identity of Sheila Macklin, the ghost of whose past misfortune might rise to shame her at any time—the girl could never be happy. Did Tunis Latham succeed in getting the Balls to take Sheila in and give her a home, this story that so bowed her down would continually threaten its revelation, like a pirate ship hovering in the offing!

And there was, too, a deeper reason why he could not introduce Sheila Macklin to Big Wreck Cove folk. It was no reason he could give the girl at this time. In some ways the captain of the *Seamew* was wise enough. He felt that this was no time to put forward his personal and particular desires. Enough

that she had admitted him to her friendship and had given him her confidence.

She had accepted him in all good faith in a brotherly sense. He dared not spoil his influence with her by revealing a deeper interest.

"We may as well look at this thing calmly and sensibly," Tunis said, answering her statement of what was indubitably a fact. "It is quite true my old neighbors would not accept you as Sheila Macklin. But they need you; no other kind of a girl would so suit their need. And you could not help loving them; nor they you, once they learned to know you."

"I am sure I should love them," breathed Sheila.

"Then, as you are just the person they want and their home is just the place you need for shelter, I am going to take you back with me."

"Oh, Captain Latham! We—we can't do it. My name—somebody will some time be sure to hear about me, and the dreadful secret will come out."

"No, it won't," said Tunis doggedly. "There will be no secret, not such as you mean, to come out."

She gazed upon him in open-eyed surprise, her lips parted, her face aglow.

"You mean——"

"We'll leave Sheila Macklin sitting on this bench, if you will agree. She need never be traced from this point. Let her drop out of the ken of the whole world that knew her. The name can only bring

you harm; it has brought you harm. Through it you are threatened with trouble, with disaster. Your whole future is menaced through that name and the stain upon it."

She looked at him still, scarcely breathing. Latham did not realize the power he held over this girl at the moment. He was to her a living embodiment of the All Good. Almost any suggestion, no matter how reckless, he might have made, would have found an echo in her heart and the will to do it.

To few is vouchsafed that knowledge which makes all clear before the mental vision. Tunis Latham's perspicacity did not compass this thing. He did not grasp the psychological moment, as we moderns call it, and consummate there and then the only reasonable and righteous plan that it was given him to complete.

The captain of the *Seamew* was a young man very much in love. He did not question this fact at all. But in his wildest imaginings he could never have believed that the girl beside him on this bench returned his passion, that she would even listen to his protestations of affection. Not for a long time, at least.

Nor had he ever considered marriage as possible in any case when there was not love on both sides. Although he commiserated Sheila Macklin's situation most deeply, he could not dream of those depths of despair into which the girl's heart had sunk before

he came upon the scene of action. He did not understand that she was at that bitterly desperate point where she would grasp at any means of rescue which promised respectability.

He almost feared to put before her the proposition he did have in his mind. In the dusk, even, those violet eyes seemed to look to the very bottom of his soul. Fortunate for him that its clarity was visible to the girl at that moment.

He bent closer. His lips almost brushed her ear. He whispered several swift sentences into it. She listened. Some of that glow of exaltation drained out of her countenance, but it registered no disagreement. They sat for some time thereafter, talking, planning, this desperate young girl and the captain of the *Seamew*.

"What do you know about this?" Orion Latham growled. "The mate bunkin' in with cooky and the skipper slingin' a hammock in the fo'c's'le while the whole cabin's to be given up to a girl. A woman aboard! Never knew no good to come of that on any craft. What is this schooner, a passenger packet?"

"You was sayin' she was already hoodooed," chuckled Horace Newbegin. "I cal'late a gal sailing one trip won't materially harm the *Seamew* nor her crew."

"Who is she? That's what I want to know,"

said the supercargo, who seemed to consider the matter a personal affront.

"Skipper says she's going to live with Cap'n Ira Ball. She's some kin of his wife's. And they need somebody with 'em, up there in that lonesome place," said the ancient seaman reflectively. "That's what the skipper was doin' all day yesterday, lookin' this gal up and making arrangements for her going back to the *Seamew*. He's gone up town to get her now. We'll get away come the turn of the tide, if he's back in time."

The taxicab with Tunis and the girl arrived in season for the tide. It was quite dark on the dock to which the *Seamew* was still moored. The Captain hailed, and two of the hands were sent up for the trunk. Tunis carried the girl's hand bag.

Every member of the crew was loitering on deck, even Johnny Lark and Tony, the boy, to get a glimpse of the mysterious passenger. They saw only a slender, graceful, quick-stepping figure, her face veiled, her hands neatly gloved. Just how she was dressed and what she really looked like only daylight would reveal.

Tunis went below with her and remained until the men brought down the trunk. It was a small trunk and brand-new, as was the bag. Had one observed, the hat she wore, and even her simple frock, were likewise just out of the shop. At least the girl who was going with the *Seamew* to Big

Wreck Cove seemed to have made certain preparations for a new life.

The captain came out on deck and closed the slide. The commercial tug was puffing in toward the *Seamew's* berth.

"Come alive, boys!" said Captain Latham, taking instant command of the deck. "Cast off those lines! Get that tug hawser inboard, Horry. Mr. Chapin, will you see that those lines are coiled down properly? Keep the deck shipshape. Make less work for your watch when we get under canvas.

"Lay aft here with your men now, Horry. Tail on to those mainsheets. All together! Get away on her so we can cast loose as soon as possible from that smoky scuttle butt."

He referred to the tug. He stepped aft to take the wheel himself. The mainsail was going up smartly. The old boatswain and the Portygees swung upon the lines with vehemence. There was not more than a capful of wind; but once let the canvas fill, and the schooner would get steerageway.

"I'd rather take my chance through the channel under sail than depend on that tug," the captain added. "Like a puppy dragging around an old rubber boot. Lively there! Ready to cast off, Mr. Chapin."

The schooner was freed of the "puffing abomination," the smoke of which sooted the *Seamew's* clean sails. The heavy hawser splashed overboard

and the schooner staggered away rather drunkenly at first, tacking among the larger craft anchored out there in the harbor.

The wind was not a very helpful one and soon after midnight it fell almost calm. There were only light airs to urge the *Seamew* on. Yet she glided through the starlit murk in a ghostly fashion as though some monstrous submarine hand forced her seaward.

The water chuckled and gurgled under her bow, flashing in ripples now and then. There was no phosphorescence, no glitter or sparkle. The schooner moved on as through a tideless sea. Now and then a clutter of spars or a suit of listless sails loomed up in the dark. But even if the other craft likewise was tacking seaward, the *Seamew* passed it and dropped it behind.

Tunis paced the deck—Horry was at the wheel —and quite approved of the feat his schooner was performing.

"If she can sail like this on only a breath of wind, what can she do in a gale?" he said buoyantly in the old man's hearing.

"That's all right. She sails pretty. But I don't like that tug to sta'bo'd," growled Horry. "It 'minds me too much of the *Marlin B.*"

Captain Latham gave no heed.

The sun stretched red beams from the horizon and took the *Seamew,* all dressed out at sunrise in

her full suit of canvas, in his arms. She danced as lightly over the whitecaps that had sprung up with the breeze at dawn as though she had not a ton of ballast in her hold. Yet she was pretty well down to her Plimsoll mark.

The girl's first glimpse through the cabin window at sea and sky was a heartening one. If she had sought repose with doubt, uncertainty, and some fear weighing upon her spirit, this beautiful morning was one to revive her courage. She was fully dressed and prepared to go on deck when Tunis tapped at the slide.

"Miss Bostwick," he called, "any time you are ready the boy will come in and lay the table for breakfast."

She ran to the companionway, pushed back the door, and appeared smiling in the frame of the doorway.

"Good morning, captain!"

Her cheerfulness was infectious. All night Tunis Latham, even while lying in his hammock in the forecastle, had been ruminating in anything but a cheerful mood. Determined as he was to carry his plan through, and confident as he was of its being a good one and eminently practical, he had been considering many chances which at first blush had not appeared to him.

With his first look into her smiling countenance all those anxieties seemed dissipated. He met her

smile with one which transfigured his own handsome face.

"May I come out on deck, captain?"

"We shall be honored by your company up here, Miss Bostwick."

She even made him a little face in secret for the formality of his address, as she flashed past him. There was a dancing light in her eye he had not seen before—at least, not in the openness of day. There was something daring about her that was a revelation. He knew at once that he need not fear her attitude when they reached the point where she must carry on her part without his aid. She displayed an innocent boldness that must dissipate suspicion in the mind of the keenest critic.

Tunis introduced Mason Chapin to her, who quite evidently liked the girl at once. Orion Latham lounged aft to meet her, his pale eyes betraying surprise as well as admiration.

"Hi golly!" said the supercargo. "I guess you come honest by the Honey side of your family tree, Miss Bostwick, though you don't favor them much in looks."

" 'Rion is given to flattery," said the captain dryly.

Horace Newbegin touched his forelock. He had been a naval man in his prime and knew what was expected when a lady trod the deck. The Portygees were all widely asmile. Indeed, the entire com-

pany of the *Seamew* was cheered by the girl's presence.

At breakfast time, which was served by Tony to the guest and the mate as well as Captain Latham, her sweet laughter floated out of the cabin and caught the attention of everybody on deck. Horry grinned wryly upon Orion.

"How 'bout this schooner being hoodooed?" he rumbled in his deep bass. "Lemme tell you, boy, I'd sail to ary end o' the world with that gal for mascot. This won't be no Jonah ship while she's aboard."

"Hi golly! Tunis Latham has all the luck," whined Orion. "Taking her down to live with Cap'n Ball and Prudence! Huh! She won't live with 'em long."

"Why not?" demanded the old salt.

"Can't you see what he's up to?" sneered Orion. "Aunt 'Cretia will be takin' a back seat 'fore long. 'Latham's Folly' will be getting a new mistress."

"Latham's Folly" was a name Medway Latham's big brown house behind Wreckers' Head had gained soon after it was built. Such a huge house for so limited a family had suggested the term to the sharp-tongued Cape Codders.

Horry Newbegin turned the idea and his quid over several times, then commented:

"Well, the skipper wouldn't be doing so bad at that!"

CHAPTER XI

AT BIG WRECK COVE

THE girl had never been to sea before, not even on a pleasure boat down the harbor. The delights of a sail to Nantasket were quite unknown to her. Naturally this voyage out through the bay and into the illimitable ocean was sure to be either a delight or a most unpleasant experience.

Happily it was the former. She proved to be a good sailor.

"You was born for a sailor's bride, miss," Horry told her.

But he said it when nobody else was by to see the blush which stained her cheek. And yet she did not look happy after the old salt's observation. He hastened to interest her in another theme.

It was the tail of the afternoon watch. Because of the light and shifting airs the *Seamew,* in spite of her wonderful sailing qualities, had only then raised the northern extremity of the Cape and, turn-

ing on her heel, was now running out to sea again on the long leg of a tack into the southeast.

Horry hung to the spokes of the wheel while the skipper was helping Orion make up the manifest. The steersman had jettisoned his usual quid of tobacco when the girl approached him, and without that aid to complacency Horry just had to talk.

"Did you see the wheel jerk then, miss? That tug to sta'bo'd is the only fault I find with this here schooner. She's a right tidy craft, and Cap'n Tunis is a good judge of sailing ships, as his father was afore him.

"But although this *Seamew* looks like a new craft, she isn't. Sure, he knowed she wasn't new, Cap'n Tunis did, when he bought her up there to Marblehead. Only trouble is, he didn't seem to go quite deep enough into her antecedents, as the feller said. He bought her on the strength of her condition and the way she sailed on a trial trip."

"Well, isn't that all right?" asked his listener. "How would one go about buying a ship?"

"Huh—ship? Well, a schooner ain't a ship, Miss Bostwick. Howsomever, buying a schooner is like buying a race horse. You want to know *his* pedigree. They said the *Seamew* had been brought up from the Gulf to sell. And maybe she was. But she is Yankee built, every timber and rope of her. She warn't built down South none."

"Shouldn't that make the bargain all the more satisfactory?" queried the girl, smiling.

"Ordinarily, yes, ma'am. But it looks like they was hidin' something. It looks like, too, she was built for sailing and fishing, not to be a cargo boat."

"I think she is beautiful."

"She is sightly, I grant ye," said Horace. "But there's something to be considered 'sides looks when a man is putting his money into a craft. As I say, her pedigree oughter be looked up. What was the schooner before they changed the slant of them masts, painted her over, and put a new name under her stern?"

"I don't understand you at all, Mr. Newbegin," said the girl, staring at him with a strange look dawning in her own countenance.

He bent toward her, after casting a knowing glance aloft. His weather-bitten face was preternaturally solemn.

"Ye can't help havin' your suspicions 'bout ships or folks that are sailin' under cover. There's got to be some reason for a man changing his name and trying to get by on one that ain't his'n. Same with a schooner like this."

"Oh!"

"There is such things as hoodooed ships, Miss Bostwick, just like there is hoodooed folks," he said hoarsely, without seeming to notice her shrinking from him and her changed countenance.

"Oh! Is there?" she inquired faintly.

"Surest thing you know," acclaimed the old seaman with his most impressive manner. "There was a hoodooed schooner sailed out o' Salem some years back, the *Marlin B.* She had the same tug to sta'bo'd that I feel when I'm steerin' of this here schooner."

The girl was recovering from her momentary excitement. She saw that Newbegin had no ulterior meaning in his speech. He shook his head and cast a wary glance toward the companionway to see that the skipper was not appearing from below.

"Listen here, Miss Bostwick," he said hoarsely. "It's a mighty curious thing. I had just come back from a v'y'ge to New Guinea, and I thinks I'd like a trip to the Banks, not having been fishin' since I was a boy. I went to Sutro Brothers in Salem and got me a berth on the *Marlin B.* I marked that every man aboard her, skipper and all, warn't Salem men, nor yet from Gloucester nor Marblehead. But I didn't suspicion nothing.

"Tell you, Miss Bostwick, them that goes down to the sea in ships runs against more than natur's wonders. There's mysteries that ain't to be explained, scurce to be spoke of. I dunno why we shouldn't believe in spirits and ghosts and dead men come alive. The Bible's full of such, ain't it?

"Well, then! And what I tell you is as sure, as sure. I took the *Marlin B.* out of that harbor, being

at the wheel. It was February, and a nasty snow squall come up and smothered us complete and proper. That schooner was a hummer; she sailed just so pretty as this one. She did for a fact. But I felt that tug to sta'bo'd. Do you know, Miss Bostwick, as I was tellin' Cap'n Tunis, there ain't never two craft just alike, no more than there is two men."

"Is that so?" she said.

"Ships is almost human. I never did see two so much alike as this *Seamew* and the *Marlin B.* Well, to continue, as the feller said, we was smothered in that snow squall for 'bout ten minutes. At the wheel there I heard off to windward the rushing sound of another craft. She was a tall ship, too, and she had as much canvas spread as we had. She came down on us like a shot.

"I shouted to the mate, but he had heard it too. He yelled for all hands on deck. We both knowed the *Marlin B.* was due to be run under unless a miracle intervened. It was a moment I ain't likely to forget, for we stood there, the whole ship's company, hanging on by backstay and rail, peering out into the smother of the snow, while the amazing rush of that unknown craft deafened us.

"Then out of her upper works—I swear I could see the tangle of ropes and slatting canvas—came a voice that rang in my ears for many a day, no matter how the others heard it. It shouted:

"We're the spirits of them ye run under! We're the spirits of them ye run under!"

"My soul and body, Miss Bostwick, but I was scairt!" confessed the old salt. "That rushing sound and the voices crashed on through our rigging and went down wind in a most amazing style. It was a ghost warning like nothing I'd ever heard before or since. And it struck the whole crew the same way. We begun to question what the *Marlin B.* was. She was a new schooner and had made but one trip to the Banks previous to this one we was on. We began to ask why her original crew had not stayed with her.

"You can't fool sailormen, Miss Bostwick," continued the old man, shaking his head with great solemnity. "They sees too much and they knows too much. Sutro Brothers had got rid of the *Marlin B.'s* first crew and picked up strangers, but murder will out. The story come to us through the night and in the snow squall. We couldn't stand for no murder ship. We made the skipper put back."

"Why, wasn't that mutiny?" gasped the girl.

"He was glad enough to turn back hisself. Even if he lost his ticket he would have turned back. Then we learned what it meant. On her first trip for fish, returning to Salem, the *Marlin B.* run under a smaller fishing craft and every soul aboard of her was lost. And it stands to reason that every time that murder schooner went out of the harbor

and came to the spot where she'd run the other craft down, those uneasy souls would rise up and denounce the *Marlin B.*"

"Oh!" gasped the girl, startled, for Tunis Latham and Orion stood behind her.

"Your tongue's hung in the middle and wags both ends, Horry," growled the young skipper. "You trying to scare Miss Bostwick out of her wits? What you poor, weak-minded, misguided fellows heard that time in the snow squall was a flock of black gulls coming down with the wind. And somebody aboard of the *Marlin B.* was a ventriloquist. Your whole crew weren't ignorant of the accident that happened on her first trip. Somebody had it in for Sutro Brothers, and made much of little, same as usual."

"Oh, they *did?*" muttered Horry.

"Anyway," said Captain Latham, "that's neither here nor there. We aren't sailing the *Marlin B.,* for she's in Chilean waters, owned by a South American millionaire. You can stow that kind of talk, Horry—anyway, while Miss Bostwick is aboard."

They were until late in the evening beating into Paulmouth Harbor, but the heavens were starlit and the air as soft as spring. The tolling of the bell buoy over Bitter Reef was mellow and soothing; they heard it for a long time before the *Seamew* made the short leg of the final tack and went rush-

ing in past the danger mark under the urge of a sudden puff of the fitful breeze.

"The old bell is welcoming us, Ida May," Captain Latham said to the girl who reclined in a canvas chair which the cook had raked out of the lazaret for her use. "I've beat my way in here when it hasn't sounded so cheerful."

"I am wondering what sort of welcome I shall receive when we get to—Wreckers' Head, do you call it?" she asked softly.

"That'll be all right, too," he told her with confidence. "Just wait and see."

They dropped anchor near the Main Street dock in order that they should be able to warp the schooner in to unload her cargo in the morning. Tunis allowed shore leave, late as the hour was. But he sat beside the passenger on the *Seamew's* deck, and they talked. It was surprising how much those two found to talk about! Perhaps a good deal of their inconsequential chatter was to hide the anxiety each felt in secret as to the future.

However, that talk was a memorable one for both Tunis Latham and the girl posing as Ida May Bostwick. Two young people can tell a great deal to each other under certain circumstances in the midwatch of a starlit night. The lap, lap of the wavelets whispering against the schooner's hull, the drone of the surf on a distant bar, and the sounds of insect

life from the shore were accompaniments to their long talk.

Orion Latham, tumbling over the forward rail from a waterside dinghy, whispered hoarsely in Johnny Lark's ear:

"What do you know about that? There they are, billin' and cooin', just where we left 'em when we went ashore. Wouldn't it sicken you?"

But Johnny only grinned and chuckled, shaking the tiny gold rings in his ears till they sparkled in the faint light. He had a girl himself in Portygee Town, at Big Wreck Cove.

The creaking of the hawsers and the "heave hos" of the crew as they warped the *Seamew* in to the wharf awoke the girl passenger in the cabin. There was little fancy about the schooner's after house, but it was comfortable.

There was a tarry smell about the place that rather pleased the girl. The lamp over the round table vibrated in its gimbals, but did not swing. There were several prints upon the walls of the cabin, prints which showed the rather exceptional taste of the *Seamew's* master, for they had been tacked up since she had come into Tunis Latham's possession.

There was, too, a somewhat faded photograph on a background of purple velvet, boxed in with glass, screwed to the forward stanchion. It was the photograph of an overhealthy-looking young woman, with scallops of hair pasted to her forehead

undoubtedly with quince-seed pomatum, her basque wrinkled across her bust because of the high-shouldered cut of it. But it had been in the extreme mode when it was made and worn, in the eighties.

The brooch which fastened the lace collar had been painted yellow by the "artist photographer" of that day, and even the earrings she wore had been touched up, or perhaps painted on with the air brush.

This was Tunis Latham's mother, the girl who had seemed so promising an addition to the family in the opinion of Medway Latham, the builder of "Latham's Folly." The rather blowzy prettiness of Captain Randall Latham's young wife had been translated into real beauty in her son; for Tunis had got his physique and open, bold physiognomy from his mother.

The girl lying in an upper berth, a close cap tied over her neatly braided hair, parted the cretonne curtains to look at these ornaments hung about the cabin. She realized that the photograph, so strangely contrasting with the prints of some of the world's masterpieces, was a sort of shrine to Tunis Latham. He revered the mother whom he had told the girl he could not remember of ever having seen. His love and admiration for that unknown mother had helped make the captain of the *Seamew* what he was.

He was a good man, a safe man for any girl to

trust. And yet he was lending himself to a specie of masquerade which, if ever it became known, would bring upon his head both derision and scorn. He risked this contumely cheerfully and with a reckless disregard for what might arise through the plans they had made while sitting beside each other on that bench on Boston Common.

He would not admit the point of his own risk. He would not consider it when they had talked, only the night before, on the deck of the schooner. He scouted every possibility of any harm coming to him through their attempt to replace the girl in a firm niche in society and give the Cap'n Ira Balls what they needed of companionship and care.

The girl sat up in the berth and let her bare legs dangle a moment before dropping to the rug. In her bare feet she padded to the photograph of Captain Randall Latham's young wife.

The girl stood before the old photograph, her hands clasped, her gaze raised to the pictured face, as a votary might stand before the Madonna. There were tears in the girl's violet eyes. At that moment she was uplifted, carried out of herself by the wealth of feeling in her heart. Her lips moved.

"I promise," she said softly, "I promise you that I will never do anything that will hurt him. I promise you that I will never let him do anything that may harm him. He has given me my chance. I promise before you and God that he shall not be

sorry, ever, that he has raised me out of the dust."

She stood on tiptoe and pressed her lips to the glass which covered the photograph.

The wind held fair, a quartering offshore blow, and the schooner, having discharged her cargo, just past noon spread her upper sails, caught a gentle breeze of old Boreas, and shot out of the harbor and so to the southward with a following wind which brought her to the mouth of Big Wreck Cove long before nightfall.

Upon the bluff of Wreckers' Head was to be dimly seen the sprawling Ball homestead. Tunis pointed it out to the passenger.

"That is where you are going to be happy, Ida May," he said to her softly.

"I wonder," murmured the girl.

He looked down into her rapt face. The violet eyes were fixed upon the old house and the brown-and-green fields immediately surrounding it. Perhaps Cap'n Ira and Prudence were out there now, watching from the front yard the white-winged *Seamew* threading so saucily the crooked passage into the cove, the sand bars on one hand and the serried teeth of the Lighthouse Point Reef on the other.

Inside the cove the schooner's canvas was reduced smartly to merely a topsail and jib, the wind in which carried her close enough to Luiz Wharf for a line to be cast ashore. Tier upon tier of barrels

of clams were stored under the open sheds, ready to be packed away in the *Seamew's* hold. Orion loudly acclaimed against a malign fate.

"Hi golly! Ain't we goin' to have no spare time at all? This running in a coasting packet is plain slavery; that's what it is! A man don't have a chance even to go home and change his socks 'tween trips."

"Have a clean pair in your duffel bag; then you won't have to go home for 'em, 'Rion," advised Tunis. "We've got to make hay while the sun shines. There'll be loafing enough to cut into the profits by and by when bad weather breaks."

Orion grunted pessimistically. Little in this world ever just suited Orion.

"She's a hoodooed packet. I said it from the first," he muttered to Horry. "You know well enough what she was before they gave her a lick of paint and a new name. We'll all pay high yet for sailin' in her."

"I wouldn't let Cap'n Tunis hear me say that 'nless I was seekin' a new berth," rejoined the old mariner.

Tunis left the mate and Horry to carry on while he took the passenger ashore, meaning to spend the night himself at home with Aunt Lucretia. He stopped to get Eunez Pareta's father to harness up his old horse and transfer Miss Bostwick's trunk and bag to the Ball homestead. Eunez was in evi-

dence—as she always was when Tunis came by—a bird of paradise indeed. Her languishing glances at Tunis flashed in their change to suspicious glares at the girl waiting in the roadway.

"You have a guest, Tunis Latham?" she asked with a composure which scarcely hid her jealousy and doubt.

"I'm taking her up to the Balls'. She's Mrs. Ball's niece, Eunez," Tunis said good-naturedly. He was always friendly with these Portygees. That was why he got along so well with them and they liked to work for him. Many of the Big Wreck Cove folk looked upon them even now as "furriners" who had to be shouted at if one would make them understood.

"What does she come for?" asked Eunez sharply.

"They need her up there. Mrs. Ball is feeble and so is the captain. She is going to live with them right along."

"Ah-ha!" whispered Eunez, as he passed her to step outside the house again. She seized his arm and swung him around to face her, for she was strong. "You think she is pretty, Tunis?" she demanded.

"Eh? What's eating on you, Eunez? I never stopped to think whether she was or not?"

But he flushed, and she saw it. Eunez smiled in a way which might have puzzled Tunis Latham had he stopped to consider it. But he joined the

girl who was waiting for him, and they went on up the road and out of the town without his giving a backward glance or thought to the fiery Portygee girl.

When they mounted to the windswept headland the visitor looked about with glowing eyes, breathing deeply. The flush of excitement rose in her cheek. He knew that as far as the physical aspect of the place went, she was more rejoiced than ever she had expected to be.

"Beautiful—and free," she whispered.

"You've said it, now, Ida May," he agreed. "From up here it looks like the whole world was freer and a whole lot brighter. It is a great outlook."

"And is that the house?" the girl asked, for in approaching the Ball homestead from this angle it looked different from its appearance as viewed standing on the deck of the inbound *Seamew*.

"That is the Ball house, and Aunt Prue taking in her wash," Tunis replied. "I suppose she had John-Ed Williams' wife over to wash for her, but Myra will have gone home before this to get the supper. Tush! Aunt Prue ought not to try to do that."

The fresh wind blowing over the headland filled every garment on the lines like ballooning sails. The frail, little old woman had to stand on tiptoe to get each article unpinned from the line. The

wind wickedly sought to drag the linen from her grasp.

Cap'n Ira, hobbling around from the front of the house, hailed his wife in some rancor:

"I don't see why you have to do that. Don't we pay that woman for washing them clothes? And ain't she supposed to take 'em down off'n the halyards? I swan! You'll be inter that basket headfirst, yet, like ye was inter the grain chist. Look out!"

"They wasn't all dry when Myra Williams went home, Ira. And I don't dare leave 'em out all night. Half of 'em would blow over the edge of the bluff. The wind is terrible strong."

It was much too strong for her frail arms, that was sure. The captain turned in anger to look for help about the open common. He saw the two figures briskly moving up the road toward the house.

"I swan! Who's this here?" he exclaimed. "Tunis Latham, and—and Ida May!"

His face broadened into a delighted smile. He had seen the *Seamew* come in, and had prayerfully hoped her master had brought the girl that he believed would be their salvation. This person with the captain of the *Seamew* could only be Ida May Bostwick!

At the moment Prudence was taking down her own starched, blue house dress from the line. It was hung like a pirate in chains by its sleeves, was

blown out as round as a barrel, and was as stiff as a board. Just as the pins came out an extra heavy puff of wind shrieked around the corner of the house, as though it had been lying in wait for just this opportunity.

The dress was whipped out of Aunt Prue's hands. She herself, as Cap'n Ira had warned her, was cast, face downward, into the half-filled clothes basket. The blue dress was whirled high in the air, skirt downward. Before the old man was warned by Prudence's muffled scream that something had gone wrong, the starched dress plumped down over his head and shoulders, and he was bound fast and blinded in its folds.

"Drat the thing! What did I tell ye?" bawled Cap'n Ira. "Take this here thing off'n me! Want to make me more of an old Betty than I be a'ready—a-dressin' me in women's clothes? I swan!"

CHAPTER XII

A NEW HAND AT THE HELM

TUNIS ran to the old man's rescue, but it was the girl who lifted Prudence from out the laundry basket.

"Drat the thing!" ejaculated Cap'n Ira, fighting off the starched dress. "Feel like I was being smothered by a complete suit of sails. That you, Tunis?"

"Yes, Cap'n Ira. You're all right now. Hold on! Don't let's mess up Aunt Prue's wrapper more than can be helped. 'Vast there!"

"I swan! Don't it beat all what a pickle we get into? We ain't no more fit to be alone, me an' Prue, than a pair o' babies. For the lan's sake, Tunis! Who is that?"

He was staring at the girl, who led forward the trembling old woman, her strong, young arms about the thin shoulders. Prudence was tearful but smiling.

"This is the girl you sent me for," said the captain of the *Seamew*.

The girl was smiling, too. To the delight of the young man there was no suspicion of fear or shyness in her expression. Her eyes were luminous. Her smile he thought would have ravished the heart of a misogynist.

"I swan!" murmured Cap'n Ira, almost prayerfully.

"Ain't she pretty, Ira?" cried Prudence, almost girlish herself in her new happiness. "Just like Sarah Honey was when she was Ida May's age. And ain't it sweet, her coming to us this way? She's brought her trunk. She's going to stay."

"And I know I shall be happy here, Uncle Ira," said the girl, giving him her hand.

Cap'n Ira's smile was as ecstatic as that of his wife. He looked sidewise at Tunis, a glance of considerable admiration.

"It takes you to do it, Tunis. I couldn't have brought home a nicer lookin' gal myself. I swan!"

"Now, you hesh your foolin', Ira," cried his wife, while the younger man's blush admitted unmistakably his feelings. "Don't you mind him, Ida May. Come into the house, now, and you, too, Tunis. We'll have supper in a jiffy."

"No," said the captain of the *Seamew*. "I must be getting on. Aunt Lucretia will be expecting me, for, of course, she saw the schooner heading in for

the cove. Good night, Ida May." He shook hands with her quietly. "I know you will be happy here, with your own folks."

The girl looked deep into the young man's eyes; nor did she free her hand from his clasp immediately. At one side stood the two old people, both smiling, and not a little knowingly and slyly at each other, while the captain of the *Seamew* and the girl bade each other good night. Cap'n Ira whispered in his wife's ear:

"Look at that now! How long d'you think we'll be able to keep Ida May with us? I cal'late we'd better build our boundary fence a great sight higher and shut him out o' walkin' across this farm."

But Prudence only struck at him with a gently admonitory hand. Tunis and Ida May had taken down the remainder of the wash and the former carried it into the house before he started on for his own home.

The girl, walking behind the old couple into the homelike kitchen, sensed the warming hospitality of the place. It was just as though she had known all this before, as though, in some past time, she had called the Ball homestead *home*.

"Lay off your hat and coat, Ida May, on the sitting-room lounge," said Prudence. "We'll have supper before I show you upstairs. Me and Ira sleep down here, but there's a nice, big room up there I've fixed up for you."

"Before you were sure I could come?" the girl asked in some wonder.

"She's got faith enough to move mountains, Prudence has," broke in Cap'n Ira proudly. "At least, I cal'late she's got enough to move this here Wreckers' Head if she set out to." And he chuckled.

"But you believed Ida May would come, too. You said so, Ira," cried his wife.

"I swan! I had to say it to keep up with you," he returned. "Otherwise you'd have sailed fathoms ahead of me. However, if you hadn't come, gal, neither of us could have well said to the other them bitterest of all human words: 'I told you so!' "

"How could you suppose I would not come?" asked the girl gayly. "Who would refuse such a generous offer?"

"I knowed you'd see it that way," said Prudence happily.

"But there might have been circumstances we could not foresee," Cap'n Ira said. "You—you didn't have many friends where you was stopping?"

"No *real* friends."

"Well, there is a difference, I cal'late. No young man, o' course, like Tunis Latham, for instance?"

"Now, Ira!" admonished Prudence.

But Ida May only laughed.

"Nobody half as nice as Captain Latham," she said with honesty.

"Well, I cal'late he would be hard to beat, even here on the Cape," agreed the inquisitive old man.

He took a pinch of snuff and prepared to enjoy it. Suddenly remembering his wife's nervousness, he shouted in a high key:

"Looker—out—Prue! *A-choon!*"

"Good—— Well, ye did warn me that time, Ira, for a fact. But if I had a cake in the oven 'stead of biscuit, I guess 'twould have fell flat with that shock. I do wish you could take snuff quiet. Look an' see, will you, Ida May, if those biscuits are burning?"

The girl opened the oven door to view briefly the two pans of biscuit.

"They are not even brown yet, Aunt Prue. But soon."

"The creamed fish is done. I hope you like salt fish, Ida May?"

"I adore it!"

"Lucky you do," put in Cap'n Ira. "I can't say that I think it is actually 'adorable.' But then, I ain't been eatin' it as a steady shore diet much more'n sixty-five year."

"Don't you run down your victuals, Ira," said his wife.

"No, I don't cal'late to. But if I may be allowed to express my likes and dislikes, I got to be honest and say that there's victuals I eat that would have suited me better for a steady diet than pollack and

potatoes. And now we don't even have the potatoes, 'cause we can't raise 'em no more."

"But you have land. I see a garden," said Ida May briskly.

"Yes, it's land," said Cap'n Ira, in the same pessimistic way. "But it ain't had a coat of shack fish for three years and this spring not much seaweed. Besides that, after the potatoes are planted, who is to hoe 'em and knock the bugs off?"

"Oh!" commented Ida May, with a small shudder.

He grinned broadly.

"There's a whole lot o' work to farming. I'd rather plow the sea than plow the land, and that's no idle jest! Never could see how a man could be downright honest when he says he likes to putter with a garden. Why, it's working in one place all the time. When he looks up from his job, there's the same old reefs and shoals he's been beatin' about for years. No matter how often he shoots the sun, the computation's bound to be just the same. He's there, or thereabout."

"That's the way with most longshoremen, Ida May," said Prudence, sighing. "They make awful poor farmers if they are good seamen. Can't seem to combine the two trades."

"I cal'late that's so," agreed Cap'n Ira, his eyes twinkling. "They'd ought to examine all the babies born on the Cape first off, and them that ain't web-

footed ought to be sent to agricultural school 'stead of to the fishing. But that ain't why our potato crop's a failure this year. And as far as I see, talking won't cure many fish, either."

"Can't I help?" asked Ida May in her gentle voice. "You know, I've come here to work. I don't expect to play lady."

"Well, I don't know. It ain't the kind of work you are used to."

"I've been used to work all my life, and all kinds of work," interposed the girl bravely.

"But you seem so eddicated," Prudence said.

"Getting an education did not keep me from learning how to use my hands."

"Well, Sarah Honey was a right good housekeeper," granted Prudence.

At that the girl fell suddenly silent, as she did whenever Sarah Honey's name was mentioned. And yet she knew she must get used to such references to her presumed mother. Prudence frequently recalled incidents which had happened when Sarah Honey visited the Ball house before she was married.

They had supper, a plentiful meal if there was not much variety. Prudence had made a "two-egg cake" and opened a jar of beach-plum preserves to follow the creamed fish and biscuits.

"I must learn to make biscuit as good as these," said Ida May.

"I expect you are more used to riz bread. City folks are. But on the Cape we don't have that much. Our men folks want hot bread at every meal. We pamper 'em," said Prudence.

"I'm pampered 'most to death, that's a fact," grumbled Cap'n Ira.

Ida May briskly cleared the table and washed the dishes. She would not allow Prudence even to wipe them.

"I'm sitting here like a lady, Ira," said the little old woman. "This child will work herself to death if we let her."

"A willin' horse always does get driv' too fast," commented Cap'n Ira.

"A new broom sweeps clean," laughed the girl, rinsing out the dishcloths and hanging them on the line behind the stove.

They went outside in the gloaming and sat in a sheltered nook where they could watch the lights twinkling all along the coast to the southward, the revolving lantern at Lighthouse Point, the steady beacon on Eagle's Head, and now and then the flash of the great one of Monomoy Point so far away. It was peaceful, quiet, assuring, and, the girl thought, heavenly! She thought for a moment of Sellers' restaurant and the little room she had occupied on Hanover Street. *This* was contentment.

Old Pareta had brought her trunk and bag and carried them up to the big, well-furnished room she

was to occupy. By and by Prudence went up with her to see that she was made comfortable there, and to watch her unpack, for the old woman was not without curiosity regarding the "city fashions."

One window of the room looked to the north. Through this Ida May saw the steady beam of a lamp shining from a house down in what seemed to be a depression behind the Head. She asked Prudence what that was.

"That must be a light at 'Latham's Folly,' Tunis' house, you know," said the little old woman, likewise peering through the window. "Shouldn't be surprised if 'twas right in his room. He sleeps this end of the house. Yes, that's what it is."

"So Captain Latham lives just there?" the girl said softly.

"When he's ashore. He and his Aunt Lucretia. They are the only Lathams left of their branch of the family."

Afterward, when Ida May had come upstairs to go to bed, she looked to the northward again. The light was still there. She knelt by the open window in her nightgown and watched the light for a long time. When it finally was extinguished she crept into bed.

She heard the nasal tones of the two old people below, for her door on the stairs was open. She heard, too, the occasional cry of a night fowl and, in the distance, the barking of an uneasy watchdog.

But after all, and in spite of the many, many thoughts which shuttled to and fro in her mind, she did not lie awake for long. It was a clear and sparkling night; there were no foghorns to disturb her dreams with their raucous warnings, and the surf along the beaches below the Head merely scuffed its way up and down the strand with a soothing "Hush! Hush-sh!"

At dawn, however, there came a noise which roused the newcomer to Wreckers' Head. She awoke with a start. Something had clattered upon her window sill, that window looking toward the north. She sat upright in bed to listen. The clatter was repeated. In the dim, gray light she saw several tiny objects bounding into the room.

She scrambled out of the high four-poster and shrugged her feet into slippers. She crept to the window, holding the nightgown close at the neck. She felt one of the tiny objects under the soft sole of her slipper and stooped to secure it. It was a pebble.

More pebbles rattled on the window sill. She stepped forward then with considerable bravery, and looked down. What she saw at first startled her. A tall, misty, gray object stood below the window, something quite ghostly in appearance, something which moved in the dim light.

"Why, what——"

Then the thing stamped and blew a faint whinny.

She saw a pale, long face raised and two pointed ears twitching above it.

"A horse!"

A darker figure rose up suddenly from before the strange animal.

"Ida May!"

"Why, Captain Latham!"

"Cat's foot!" exclaimed the captain of the *Seamew.* "I thought I'd never wake you up without disturbing the old folks. No need to ask *you* if you rested well."

"Oh, gloriously!" whispered the girl, beaming down upon him, but keeping out of the full range of his vision.

"Sorry I had to wake you, but I'm due at the wharf right now to see that the hands get those clams stowed aboard. We want to get away on the morning tide. I brought Queenie home and thought I'd better tell you."

"Queenie?"

"The Queen of Sheba, you know. I was telling you about Cap'n Ira's old mare."

"Oh, yes! Wait. I'll dress and be right down."

"That's all right," said Tunis. "I'll wait."

She scurried into the clothes she had laid out before going to bed. In five minutes she crept down the stairs into the kitchen and out of the back door. Tunis, holding the sleepy mare by her rope bridle, met her between the kitchen ell and the barn.

"You look as bright as a new penny," he chuckled. "But it's early yet for you to be astir. I'll put Queenie in her stable and show you where the feed is. Aunt Prue will like to have her back. She sets great store by the old mare. She won't be much bother to you, Ida May."

"Nothing will ever be a bother to me here, Captain Latham," said the girl cheerfully.

"That's the way to talk," he said, with satisfaction. "Just you keep on that tack, Ida May, and things will go swimmingly, I've no doubt."

In ten minutes he was briskly on his way to the town. The girl watched him from the back stoop as long as he was to be seen in the morning mist. Then she went back into the house, made a more careful toilet, and when Cap'n Ira came hobbling into the kitchen an hour later breakfast was in preparation on the glowing stove.

"I swan! This is comfort, and no mistake," chuckled the old man, rubbing his chin reflectively. "You're going to be a blessing in this house, Ida May."

"I hope you'll always say so, Uncle Ira," returned the girl, smiling at him.

"I cal'late. Now I'll get washed, but that derned shavin'."

"You sit down in that rocker and I'll shave you," she said briskly. "Oh, I can do it! I shaved my own father when he was sick last——"

She stopped, turned away, and fell silent. It was the first time she had spoken of either of her parents, but Cap'n Ira did not notice her sudden confusion. He prepared for the ordeal, making his own lather and opening the razor.

"I can't strop it, Ida May," he groaned. "That's one of the things that's beyont my powers."

She came to him with a clean towel which she tucked carefully in at the neckband of his shirt. Practically she lathered his face and rubbed the lather into the stubble with brisk hands. He grunted ecstatically, lying back in the chair in solid comfort. He eyed her manipulation of the razor on the strop with approval.

For the first time in many a morning he was shaved neatly and with dispatch. When Prudence came feebly into the room, he hailed her delightedly.

"You've lost your job, old woman!" he cried.

"And ain't there a thing for me to do?" queried Prudence softly, yet smiling.

"Just sit down at the table, auntie," said the girl. "The coffee is made. How long do you want your eggs boiled? The water is bubbling."

"Eggs!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira. "I thought them hens of Prue's had give up layin' altogether."

"I found some stolen nests in the barn," returned Ida May. "They have been playing tricks on you."

It was near noon when Ida May from an upper window saw the *Seamew* beating out of the cove

on her return trip to Boston. She watched the schooner as long as the white sails were visible. But her heart was not wholly with the beautiful schooner. A great content filled her soul. Afterward she bustled about, straightening up the house, her cheerful smile always ready when the old folks spoke. They watched her with such a feeling of thankfulness as they could not openly express.

After dinner she started on the ironing and proved herself to be as capable in that line as in everything else.

"Maybe she's been a shopgirl, Ira," Prudence observed in private to her husband; "but Sarah Honey didn't neglect teaching her how to keep any man's home neat and proper."

"Sh!" admonished Cap'n Ira. "Don't put no such ideas in the gal's head."

"What ideas?" the old woman asked wonderingly.

His eyes twinkled and he rewarded himself with a generous pinch of snuff before repeating his bon mot:

"If you don't tell her she'll make some man a good wife, maybe she won't never know it! Looker out, Prudence! *A-choon!*"

CHAPTER XIII

SOME YOUNG MEN APPEAR

A HOUSE plant brought out into the May sunshine and air expands almost immediately under the rejuvenating influences of improved conditions. Its leaves uncurl; its buds develop; it turns at once and gratefully to the business of growing which has been restricted during its incarceration indoors.

So with Sheila Macklin—she who now proclaimed herself Ida May Bostwick and who was gladly welcomed as such by the old people at the Ball homestead on Wreckers' Head. After the girl's experiences of more than three years since leaving her home town, the surroundings of the house on the headland seemed an estate in paradise.

As for the work which fell to her share, she enjoyed it. She felt that she could not do too much for the old people to repay them for this refuge they had given her. That Cap'n Ira and Prudence had no idea of the terrible predicament

in which she had been placed previous to her coming made no difference to the girl's feeling of gratitude toward them. She had been serving a sentence in purgatory, and Tunis Latham's bold plan had opened the door of heaven to her.

The timidity which had so marked her voice and manner when Tunis had first met her soon wore away. With Cap'n Ira and Prudence she was never shy, and when the captain of the *Seamew* came back again he found such a different girl at the old house on Wreckers' Head that he could scarcely believe she was the Sheila Macklin who had told him her history on the bench on Boston Common.

"I swan, Tunis," hoarsely announced Cap'n Ira, "you done a deed that deserves a monument equal to that over there to Plymouth. Them Pilgrim fathers—to say nothing of the mothers—never done no more beneficial thing than you did in bringing Ida May down here to stay along o' Prudence and me. And I cal'late Prue and me are more thankful to you than the red Indians was to the Pilgrims for coming ashore in Plymouth County and so puttin' the noses of Provincetown people out o' joint."

He chuckled.

"She's as sweet as them rose geraniums of Prue's and just as sightly looking. Did you ever notice how that black hair of hers sort of curls about her ears, and them ears like little, tiny seashells ye pick

up 'long shore? Them curls just lays against her neck that pretty! I swan! I don't see how the young fellers kept their hands off her where she come from. Do you?"

"Why, you old Don Juan!" exclaimed Tunis, grinning. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Me? Aha! I've come to that point of age and experience, Tunis, where whatever I say about the female sect can't be misconstrued. That's where I have the advantage of you."

"Uh-huh!" agreed Tunis, nodding.

"Now, if you begun raving about that gal's black hair—— An' come to think of it, Tunis, her mother, Sarah Honey's hair was near 'bout red. Funny, ain't it?"

"The Bostwicks must have been dark people," said Tunis evenly.

But he remembered in a flash the "fool's gold" which had adorned in rich profusion the head of the girl in the lace department of Hoskin & Marl's.

"Well, the Honeys warn't. None I ever see, leastways," announced Cap'n Ira. "Howsomever, Ida May fits her mother's maiden name in disposition, if ever a gal did. She's pure honey, Tunis; right from the comb! And she takes to everything around the house that handy."

Prudence was equally enthusiastic. And Tunis Latham could see for himself many things which marked the régime of the newcomer at the Ball

homestead as one of vast improvement over that past régime of the old couple, who had been forced to manage of late in ways which troubled their orderly souls.

"Catch as catch can," was Cap'n Ball's way of expressing the condition of the household and other affairs before the advent of Ida May. Now matters were already getting to be "shipshape," and no observer could fail to note the increased comfort enjoyed by Cap'n Ira and Prudence.

Nor need Tunis feel anxious, either, regarding the girl's state of mind or body. She was so blithe and cheerful that he could scarcely recall the picture of that girl who had waited upon him in the cheap restaurant on Scollay Square. Here was a transformation indeed!

Nor had Ida May's activities been confined wholly to the house and the old folks' comfort. He noted that the wire fence of the chicken run was handily repaired; that Aunt Prue's few languishing flowers had been weeded; and that one end of the garden was the neater for the use of hoe and rake.

It was too late in the season, of course, for much new growth in the vegetable beds; but the half-hearted attention of John-Ed, junior, had never brought about this metamorphosis, Tunis well knew. He went on to the Latham house, feeling well pleased. Aside from all other considerations, he

was glad to know that his Machiavellian plan had brought about these good results.

He did not have much time to spend with Sheila, for the *Seamew's* freighting business was good. He never remained ashore but one night between trips, and he spent that evening with his Aunt Lucretia, whose enjoyment of his presence in the house was none the less keen because inarticulate.

But when he started off across the fields for the port in the early morning he saw Sheila's rising light, and she was at the back door to greet him when he went past. They stole a little time to be together there, whispering outside the door so as not to awaken Cap'n Ira and Prudence. And Tunis Latham went on to the wharf where the *Seamew* tied up with a warmth at his heart which he had never experienced before.

That another girl rose betimes on these mornings and waited and watched for him to pass, the young schooner captain never noticed. That Eunez Pareta should be lingering about the edge of Portygee Town as he came down from the Head made small impression on his mind. He never particularly remarked her presence or her smile as being for him alone. It was that Eunez did not count in any of his calculations.

"That girl at Cap'n Ball's place, Tunis," said the Portygee girl. "Does she like it up there?"

"Oh, yes! She's getting on fine," was his careless response.

"And will they keep her?"

"Of course they will keep her." He laughed. "Who wouldn't, if they got the chance?"

"*Si?*" Eunez commented sibilantly.

Naturally, many people besides Eunez Pareta in and about Big Wreck Cove were interested in the coming of the stranger to Cap'n Ira Ball's. Those housewives who lived on Wreckers' Head and in the vicinity were able more easily to call at the Ball homestead for the express purpose of meeting and becoming acquainted with "Sarah Honey's daughter." And they did so.

"I'd got into the way of thinking," remarked Cap'n Ball dryly, "that most folks—'ceptin' John-Ed and his wife—had got the notion we'd dried up here, Prue and me, and blowed away. Some of 'em ain't never come near in six months. I swan!"

"Now, Ira," admonished his wife, "do have charity."

"Charity? Huh! I'll take a pinch of snuff instead. That's a warnin', Prudence! *A-choon!*"

Not until the second Sunday after the *Seamew* had brought Ida May from Boston did Big Wreck Cove folk in general get a "good slant," as they expressed it, at the Balls' visitor. There was an ancient carryall in the barn, and on the Saturday previous little John-Ed was caught and made to

clean this vehicle, rub up the green-molded harness, and give the Queen of Sheba more than "a lick and a promise" with the currycomb and brush.

At ten o'clock on Sunday morning Sheila herself backed the gray mare out of her stable and harnessed her into the shafts of the carryall.

"For a city gal, you are the handiest creature!" sighed Prudence, marveling.

The girl only smiled. She was now used to such comments. They did not make her heart flutter as had any reference to her past life at first.

The bell in the steeple of the green-blinded, white-painted church on the farther edge of the port was tinkling tinnily as the girl drove the old mare down the hill, with Cap'n Ira and Prudence in the rear seat of the carriage.

"We ain't felt we could undertake churchgoing for months, Ida May," the old woman said. "And I miss Elder Minnett's sermons."

"So do I," agreed her husband, with his usual caustic turn of speech. "I swan! I can sleep better under the elder's preaching than I can to home."

"If you go to sleep to-day, Ira, I shall step on your foot," warned his wife.

"You'd better take care which one you step on," rejoined Cap'n Ira. "I got a corn on one that jumps like an ulcerated tooth. If you touch that I shall likely surprise you more'n I do when I take snuff."

The Portygees had a chapel devoted to their faith. The carriage passed that on the way to the Congregational Church. A girl, very dark as to features, very red as to lips, and dressed in very gay colors in spite of her destination, was mounting the chapel steps. She halted to stare particularly at the quietly dressed girl driving the gray mare.

"Ain't that Pareta's girl, Ira?" asked Prudence.

"I cal'late."

"What a bold-looking thing she's grown to be! But she's pretty."

"As a piney," agreed Cap'n Ira. "I reckon she sets all these Portygee boys by the ears. I hear tell two of 'em had a knife fight over her in Luiz's fish house some time ago. She'll raise real trouble in the town 'fore she's well and safely married."

"That is awful," murmured the old woman, casting another glance back at the girl and wondering why Eunez Pareta scowled so hatefully after them.

Following service, as usual, there was social intercourse on the steps of the church and at the horse sheds back of it. Particularly did the women gather about Aunt Prudence and Sheila. As for the men, both young and old, the newcomer's city ways and unmistakable beauty gave them much to gossip about. Several of the younger masculine members of Elder Minnett's congregation came almost to blows over the settlement of who should take the fly cloth off Queenie, back her around, and

lead her out to the front of the church when the time came to drive back to the Head.

In addition, Cap'n Ira found himself as popular with the young men as he was wont to be in the old days when he was making up his crew at the port for the *Susan Gatskill.*

"Prudence," he said to his wife, but quite loud enough for the girl to hear as they drove sedately homeward, "I cal'late I shall have to buy me some shot and powder and load up the old gun I put away in the attic, thinking I wouldn't never go hunting no more."

"Goodness gracious gallop!" ejaculated his wife. "What for? I cal'late you *won't* go hunting at your time of life!"

"I dunno. I may be forced to load it up for protection. But maybe rock salt will do instead of shot," said Cap'n Ira, still with soberness. "A feller has got a right to protect himself and his family."

"Against what, I want to know?"

"I can see the Ball place is about to be overrun with a passel of young sculpins that are going to be more annoying than a dose of snuff in your eye. That's right."

"Why, how you talk!"

"Didn't ye see 'em all standing around as we drove away from the church, casting sheep's eyes? And they're hating each other already like a hen hates dishwater. I swan!"

"For the land's sake!"

"No. For Ida May's sake," chuckled Cap'n Ira. "That's who I've got to defend with a shotgun."

The girl flushed rosily, but she laughed, too.

"You can leave them to me, Uncle Ira. I shall know how to get rid of them."

"Maybe they won't come," said Prudence.

"They won't? I swan!" snorted her husband. "They all see she's more'n half Honey. Couldn't keep 'em away any more than you can flies."

It was quite as Cap'n Ira prophesied. The path from Big Wreck Cove across the fields to the Head, a path which had become grass-grown of late years, was soon worn smooth. It was a shorter way from the town than the wagon road.

The errands invented by the youthful and more or less unattached male inhabitants of the port to bring them by this path through the Ball premises were most ingenious indeed. Early on Monday morning, while Sheila was hanging out her first lineful of clothes, Andrew Roby, clam basket and hoe on arm, appeared as the first of a long line of itinerant pedestrians who more or less bashfully bade Cap'n Ira good day as he sat in his armchair in the sun.

"What's the matter?" asked the old man soberly. "All the clams give out down to the cove? I heard they was getting scarce. You got to come clean

over here to the beaches, I cal'late, to find you a mess for dinner, Andy?"

"Well—er—Cap'n Ira, mother was wishing for some big chowder clams," said young Roby, his eyes squinting sidewise at the slim figure of Sheila on tiptoe to reach the line.

"Ye-as," considered the old man. "You got that cat still, Andy?"

"The *Maybird?* Oh, yes, sir!"

"And there's a fair wind. She'd have taken you in half the time to the outer beaches, and saved your legs," said the caustic speaker. "But exercise is good for you, I don't dispute."

A match, one might think, could easily have been touched off at Andrew's face. He had not much more to say, and went on without having the joy of more than a nod and smile from the busy Sheila.

Then came Joshua Jones. Joshua usually was to be found behind his father's counter, the elder Jones being proprietor of one of the general stores in Big Wreck Cove. Joshua was a bustling young man with a reddish ruff of hair back of a bald brow, "side tabs" of the same hue as his hair before each red and freckled ear, and a nose a good deal like an eagle's beak. In fact, the upper part of his face—Cap'n Ira had often remarked it—was of noble proportions, while the lower part fell away surprisingly in a receding chin which seemed saved

from being swallowed completely only by a very prominent Adam's apple.

"I swan!" the captain had said judiciously. "It's more by good luck than good management that Josh's chin didn't fall into his stomach. Only that knob in his neck acts like a stopper."

But when the lanky young storekeeper appeared on this occasion, Cap'n Ira hailed him cheerfully before Joshua could reach the back door.

"Hi, Josh! You ain't goin' for clams, too, be ye?"

"No, no, Cap'n Ira!" cried young Jones cheerfully. "I'm looking to pick up some eggs regular. We want to begin to ship again, and eggs seem to be staying in the nests. He, he! Has Mrs. Ball got any to spare?"

"I don't cal'late she has. You see," said Cap'n Ira soberly, "we got another mouth to feed eggs to now. Did you know we had Ida May Bostwick visiting us? A young lady from Boston. Prue's niece, once removed."

"Why—I—I—ahem! I saw her at church, Cap'n Ira," faltered Joshua.

"Did ye, now?" rejoined Cap'n Ira, in apparent wonder. "I didn't suppose you would ever notice her, you not being much for the ladies, Joshua."

"Oh, I ain't so blind!" giggled the young man, peering in through the kitchen door, where Sheila

was stepping briskly from tubs to sink and back again.

"That's a fortunate thing," agreed the old man. "But you've got a long v'y'ge before you, if you cal'late to go to all the houses on the Head to pick up eggs. Good luck to you, Joshua!"

Josh found himself passed along like a country politician in line at a presidential reception. His legs got to working without volition, it seemed, and he was several rods away before he realized that he had not spoken to the girl at all.

Zebedee Pauling, whose ancestor had been an admiral and was never forgotten by the Pauling family—Paulmouth was said to have been named in their honor—arrived at the Ball back door just as the family was finishing the usual "picked-up" washday dinner. Zebedee took off his cap with a flourish, and his grin advertised to all beholders the fact that he felt shy but pleased at his own courage in appearing thus on the Head.

"Why, Zeb!" exclaimed Prudence. "We haven't seen you up here for a dog's age. Won't you set?"

"Oh, no'm, no'm! I was just stopping by and thought I'd ask how are you all, Aunt Prue."

He bobbed and smiled, but kept his gaze fixed upon Sheila to the exclusion of the two old people. But Cap'n Ira was never to be overlooked.

"You're going to be mighty neighborly, now, Zeb," he said. "We shall see you often."

"Er—I don't know, Cap'n Ira," stammered Zebedee, rather taken aback.

The old man rose and hobbled toward the door with the aid of his cane, fumbling in his pocket meanwhile.

"Here, Zeb," he said, producing a dime. "You're a willin' friend, I know. I'm running low on snuff. Get me a packet, will ye? American Affection is my brand. Just slip it in your pocket and bring it along with you when you come by to-morrow."

"But—but I don't know as I shall be up this way to-morrow, Cap'n Ira. Though maybe I shall." And he glanced again at the smiling girl.

"Course you will, or next day at the latest," said the old man stoutly. "I can see plainly that you ain't going to neglect Prue and me no more. And I shall want that snuff."

"Well—er—Cap'n——"

"If you don't come," pursued the perfectly sober captain, "you can hand the snuff to Andy Roby, or to Josh Jones, or to 'most any of the boys. They'll be up this way pretty near every day, I shouldn't wonder."

Zebedee took the hint and the dime.

He was no "slow coach" if he was longshore bred. He got the chance of carrying another heavy basket of clothes out to the lines for Sheila, who rewarded him with a smile, and then he nodded to the old man as he left.

"I'll bring that snuff myself, Cap'n Ira," he assured him.

"Don't it beat all?" queried the captain, shaking his head reflectively, as he resumed his seat. "Don't it beat all? For old folks, Prue, we do certainly seem to be popular."

"Oh, you hesh!" exclaimed his wife.

But Sheila giggled delightedly. The way Cap'n Ira handled the several visitors who thereafter came to Wreckers' Head continued to amuse the girl immensely. Nor did the visits cease. The Ball homestead was no longer a lonely habitation. Somebody was forever "just stopping by," as the expression ran; and the path from the port was trodden brown and sere as autumn drew on apace.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HARVEST HOME FESTIVAL

It was not that Sheila Macklin had no graver moments. There were nights when, in spite of her healthful weariness of body, arising from the work of the household, she lay awake for long hours of restless, anxious thought. And sometimes her pillow was wet with tears. Yet she was not of a lachrymose disposition. She could not invent imaginary troubles or build in her mind gibbets on which remorse and sorrow might hang in chains.

Indeed, how could she be sorrowful? Why should she feel remorse? She had taken another girl's name and claim of parentage, and she filled a place which the other girl might have had. But the rightful owner of the name had scorned this refuge. The real Ida May Bostwick had no appreciation of what the Balls had to offer, and she had been unwilling even to open communication with her relatives down on the Cape.

Besides, Tunis Latham always cheered the girl who was playing an imposter's part with the declaration that she had done just right—that without her presence on Wreckers' Head Cap'n Ira and his wife would be in a very bad way, indeed.

She could see that this was so. Her coming to them had been as great a blessing in their lives as it had been in her own.

She fully realized that Cap'n Ira and his wife would not have admitted her to their home and to their hearts had she come in her own person and identity. This was not so much because of their strict morality as because of their strict Puritanism. For a puritan may not be moral always, but he must be just. And justice of that character is seldom tempered by mercy. What they might have forgiven the real Ida May they could scarcely be expected to forgive a stranger.

In spite of this situation, the Balls were being blessed by the presence of a girl in their household who had been tainted with a sentence to a reformatory. Even now, when she knew they loved her and could scarcely imagine what they would do without her, Sheila Macklin was quite convinced that a whisper about these hidden miseries would turn Cap'n Ball, and even Prudence, against her.

Therefore she was careful, putting a guard upon her tongue and almost keeping watch upon her secret thoughts. She never allowed herself to lapse

into reverie in their presence for fear the old people might suspect that she had a past that would not endure open discussion.

And, deliberately and with forethought, the intelligent girl went about strengthening her position with the Balls and making her identity as Ida May Bostwick unassailable. She had a retentive memory. Nothing Aunt Prudence ever said in her hearing about Sarah Honey, her ways when she was young, or what the old woman knew or surmised about her dead niece's marriage and her life thereafter, escaped the girl. She treasured it all.

When visitors were by—especially the neighboring women who likewise remembered Sarah Honey—the masquerader often spoke in a way to reduce to a minimum any suspicion that she was not the rightful Ida May. Even a visit from Annabell Coffin—"she who was a Cuttle"—went off without a remark being made which would yield a grain of doubt.

Mrs. Coffin had heard of Ida May while she visited "his folks" in Boston, in a most roundabout way. She did say to the girl, however:

"Let's see, Ida May, didn't they tell me that you worked for a spell in one of them great stores? I wish you could see 'em, Aunt Prue! The Marshall & Denham department store on Washington Street covers acres—*acres!* Was it there that you worked, Ida May?"

"No," replied Ida May calmly.

"What store did you work in?"

"Hoskin & Marl's," said the girl, still unruffled.

"To be sure. That's what Esther Coffin said she heard, I remember. But I never got to that store. Couldn't go to all of 'em. It tired me to death, just going around Marshall & Denham's."

This and similar incidents were building blocks in the structure which she was raising. Nor did she consider it a structure of deceit. The foundation only was of doubtful veracity. These people had accepted her as somebody she was not, it was true; but she gained nothing thereby that the real Ida May would not have had to win for herself.

With Tunis approving and encouraging her, how could the girl spend much time in doubt or any at all in despair? She felt that she was a much better girl—morally as well as physically—in this environment than she had been for many, many months. Instead of being conscience wrung in playing the part of impostor and living under an assumed name and identity, she felt a sense of self-congratulation.

And when in the company of the captain of the *Seamew* she felt almost exalted. There was a pact between them that made their tie more than that of sister and brother. Yet, of love they never spoke —not during those first weeks on Wreckers' Head.

He never failed to talk with Sheila as he came up from the town when the schooner lay at her

moorings in the cove or was docked ready to discharge or take aboard freight. Business remained good, but all was not plain sailing for the young shipmaster. He confided in the girl many of his perplexities. When he went away again, rain or shine, the girl did not fail to be up and about when he passed the Ball homestead. He knew that she did this purposely—that she was on the watch for him. Her reason for doing so was not so clear to the young man, but he appreciated her interest.

Was he overmodest? Perhaps. He might have gained courage regarding the girl's attitude toward him had he known that, on the nights he was at home, she sat in her darkened, upper room and watched the lamp he burned until it was extinguished. On the other hand, Tunis Latham's brotherly manner and cheerful kindness were a puzzle to Sheila. She knew that he had been kinder to her than any other man she had ever met. But what was the root of that kindness?

There were many pleasant thoughts in Sheila's heart just now; nor did she allow the secret of her past to leave its acid scars upon her soul. She was the life and joy of the old house on the Head; she was the center of amusement when she went into company at the church or elsewhere. She managed, too, to be that marvelous specimen of beautiful womankind who can attract other girls as well as men.

For one thing, the girl played no favorites. She treated them all alike. None of the young men of Big Wreck Cove could honestly crow because Ida May Bostwick had showed him any special favor.

And none of them suspected that Tunis Latham had the inside track with the girl from the city. At least, this was unsuspected by all before the occasion of the "harvest-home festival"—that important affair held yearly by the ladies' aid of the Big Wreck Cove church.

For the first time in more than a year, Cap'n Ira and Prudence ventured to town in the evening. Church socials, in the past, and while Cap'n Ira was so much at sea, had been Prudence Ball's chief relaxation. She was naturally of a social disposition, and the simple pleasure of being with and of a party of other matrons of the church was almost the height of Prudence's mundane desire.

When Cap'n Ira heard her express the wish to go to the harvest-home festival he took an extra pinch of snuff.

"I swan!" he said. "If we take that Queen of Sheby out at night, she'll near have a conniption. She'll think the world's come to an end. She ain't been out o' her stable at night since Hector was a pup—and Hector is a big dog now! How can you think of such a thing, Prudence?"

"Queenie won't mind, I guess," said his wife calmly. "I shouldn't be surprised if you was say-

ing one word for her and a good many more'n one for yourself, Ira."

However, they went to the harvest-home festival. It was bound to be a very gay and enjoyable occasion, and Queenie did not stumble more than three times going down the hill into the port.

"That old critter would be the death of us, if she could do it without being the death of herself, too," fumed Cap'n Ira."

There were half a dozen young men almost fighting for the privilege of taking Queenie around to the sheds and blanketing her, the winner hopeful of a special smile and word from Sheila.

The decorated church was well filled when the trio from Wreckers' Head entered, and most delicious odors rose from the basement, where the tables were laid.

Sheila was immediately surrounded by her own little coterie of young people and was enjoying herself quietly when a newcomer, whose appearance created some little surprise at the door, approached the group of which the girl was the center.

"Why, here's Orion Latham!" exclaimed one girl. "I didn't know the *Seamew* was in."

"We just made it by the skin of our teeth," Orion said, making it a point to shake hands with Sheila. "How are you, Miss Bostwick? I never did see such a Jonah of an old tub as that dratted schooner! I thought she never would get back this trip."

"I cal'late you wouldn't think she was Jonahed if the *Seamew* was yours, 'Rion," snickered Andrew Roby.

"I wouldn't even take her as a gift," snarled Orion.

"Guess you won't get her that way—if any," chuckled Joshua Jones. "Tunis, he knows which side o' the bread his butter's on. He's doin' well. We cal'late—pa and me—to have all our freight come down from Boston on the *Seamew*."

Orion glowered at him.

"You'd better have a care, Josh," he growled. "That schooner is hoodooed, as sure as sure! She'll stub her nose some night on Lighthouse Point Reef, if she don't do worse. You can't scurcely steer her proper."

"Nonsense, 'Rion!" spoke up Zebedee Pauling. "I'd like to sail on her myself."

"Perhaps," Sheila interposed, rather flushed, and looking at Orion with unmistakable displeasure, "Orion will give up his berth to you, Zebedee. He seems so very sure that the schooner is unlucky. I came down from Boston in her, and I saw nothing about her save to admire."

"And if you found her all right, Miss Bostwick," struck in the gallant Joshua, "she's good enough for me. Of course, I heard tell some thought the *Seamew* had a bad reputation—that she run under

a fishing boat once and was haunted. But I cal'late that's all bosh."

"Yah!" growled Orion. "Have it your own way. But after the dratted schooner is sunk and you lose a mess of freight, Josh Jones, I guess you'll sing small."

"I've heard," said Andrew Roby gravely, "that it's mighty bad manners to bite the hand that feeds you. You never was overpolite, 'Rion Latham."

"Not only that, but he's clean reckless with his own livelihood," added Zebedee Pauling.

CHAPTER XV

AN INVITATION ACCEPTED

It was a small incident, of course; scarcely to be noted at all when it was over. Yet the impression left upon Sheila's mind was that Orion Latham was deliberately endeavoring to injure his cousin's business with the *Seamew*. If he talked like this before the more or less superstitious Portygees, how long would Tunis manage to keep a crew to work the schooner?

Had she dared she would have taken Orion to task there and then for his unfaithfulness. The fellow was, as Cap'n Ira had once observed, one of those yapping curs always envious of the braver dog's bone.

To the girl's disgust, too, Orion Latham showed plainly that he considered that he, as an older acquaintance of the girl, could presume upon that fact. He clung to her throughout the evening like a mussel to duck grass. Of all the Big Wreck Cove

youth, he was the only one that she could not put in his place.

She did not think it wise to snub him so openly that Orion would take offense. This course might do the captain of the *Seamew* harm. She foresaw trouble in the offing for Tunis, in any case, and she did not wish to do anything that would spur Orion to further and more successful attempts to harm his cousin's business.

There was another matter troubling Sheila's mind after Orion had come to the harvest-home festival. Mason Chapin likewise appeared at the church. But Tunis did not come. He knew, of course, of the festival, and he had known when he sailed last for Boston that the Balls and Ida May intended to go. It did seem as if Tunis might have come, if for only a little while, before going home.

These thoughts made Sheila rather inattentive to other proposals, and she found herself obliged to go down to supper with Orion, since he had outsat and outtalked all the other young men who had hovered about her. She was nice to Orion; the girl could scarcely be otherwise, even to those she disliked, unless some very important matter arose to disturb her, but she did not enjoy the remainder of the evening, and she was glad when Cap'n Ira and Prudence were ready to go home. It was full time, the girl thought.

Even then Orion Latham assumed altogether too much authority. Sheila had been about to send little John-Ed around for Queenie and the carryall, but Orion put the boy aside with a self-assured grin.

"Nobody ain't going to put you in the carriage, Ida May, but me," he declared. "I'll get the old mare."

He seized his cap and went out. In a few minutes they had said good-bye, and the old couple and the girl went out on the church steps. Sheila saw the carryall standing before the door. A figure stood at the old mare's head which she presumed to be Orion's.

"The chariot is ready, I cal'late," said Cap'n Ira. "Come on, Prudence."

Sheila helped the old woman into the rear seat and then aided Cap'n Ira as well. She got in quickly in front, but as she was about to gather up the reins the man holding Queenie's head came around swiftly and stepped in beside her to the driver's place.

"I swan! That you, Tunis?" exclaimed Cap'n Ira."

"Looks like it," the captain of the *Seamew* said gravely. "All clear aft?"

"You can pay off, Tunis," returned the old man. "Tuck that robe around your knees, Prudence. This night air is as chill as a breath off the ice barrens."

Orion loafed into the lamplight by the steps be-

fore Queenie got into action. His scowl was unseen, but his voice was audible—as it was meant to be—to Sheila's ears.

"There he is—hoggin' everything, same as usual. How did I know he was hanging around outside here, waiting to drive her home? Just as though he owned her! Huh! He may be skipper aboard that dratted schooner, but that gives him no right to boss me ashore. I won't stand it."

"Sit down to it, then, 'Rion," snickered one of the other young fellows. "I cal'late Tunis has got the inside course on all of us."

The girl said nothing to the captain of the *Seamew* at first. It was Prudence who asked him why he had not been in the church.

"I could not get over here until just now," Tunis replied quietly.

Sheila wondered if he really had been detained on the schooner. Perhaps he had refrained from coming to the festival for fear the good people of Big Wreck Cove would notice his attentions to her. He had never been publicly in her company since he had brought her down from Boston. Orion Latham's outburst there at the church door was the first cue people might have gained of anything more than a passing acquaintanceship between the captain of the *Seamew* and the girl who had come to live with the Balls.

These thoughts bore down the girl's spirits tre-

mendously. The simple pleasure of the evening was quite erased from her memory. She remained speechless while old Queenie climbed the hill to the Head.

The desultory conversation between Cap'n Ira, Prudence, and the young shipmaster scarcely attracted the girl's attention. If Tunis looked at her curiously now and then, she did not see his glances. And she merely nodded her understanding of his statement when Tunis said, speaking directly to her:

"The *Seamew's* going to lie here over Sunday this time, Ida May."

"That'll be nice for you, Tunis," Aunt Prue put in. "You can go to church. You don't often have that privilege. Seafarin' is an awful godless life."

Queenie sprang ahead gallantly at the sound of a hearty sneeze from Cap'n Ira, just then, and they were soon at home. Tunis jumped out and aided the old woman and then the captain to alight. Sheila got out on the other side of the carriage. She would have preferred to run on into the house, but she could not really do that. Queenie must be unharnessed and put in her stable and given a measure of oats to munch. Of course, Tunis would offer to do this, but she could not leave him to attend to it without a word.

"I'll help you with Queenie, Ida May," said the captain of the *Seamew*.

That settled it. She had to remain outside while

Cap'n Ira and Prudence went into the house. Tunis led the old mare toward the barn. A lantern, burning very dimly, was in a box just outside the big door, and Sheila got this and held it while Tunis busied himself with the buckles.

"I didn't mean to interfere," the man said, suddenly breaking the silence between them. "But as I was coming this way, of course, I expected to ride along with you. So——"

"What do you mean, Captain Latham?" the girl asked wonderingly.

"Orion said you sent him out to get Queenie."

"Why, I——"

"Of course, you didn't know I was there. I had just reached the church. But 'Rion is so fresh——"

"He took it upon himself to go," said the girl calmly. "I did not send him. I guess you know how your cousin is."

"He is too fresh. I'd like to punch him," growled Tunis, to the girl's secret delight. It sounded boyish, but real. "I don't know that I can stand him aboard the *Seamew* much longer. He attends to everybody's business but his own."

"He means you no good, Captain Latham," she said frankly. "To-night he was repeating that silly story about the *Seamew* being haunted."

"Cat's-foot!" ejaculated Tunis. "I wish I'd fired old Horry Newbegin for starting *that*."

"But 'Rion keeps it up."

"If he believed she was hoodoed, you wouldn't get him aboard with a wire cable," growled Tunis.

"It would be better for you and for the success of your business, Captain Latham, if 'Rion was really afraid of going aboard the *Seamew,*" she said with confidence.

"Well, I don't see how I can fire him. He's my cousin—in a way. And there is enough ill feeling in the family now. Gran'ther Peleg left all his money to me, and it made Orion and his folks as sore as can be."

"You are inclined to be too kind. I am not sure it is always wise to be too easy."

"Like chopping off the dog's tail an inch at a time, so's not to hurt him so much, eh?" he chuckled.

"Something like that."

"Well, I'm almost tempted to give 'Rion his walking ticket. I've reason enough. He can't even keep a manifest straight."

"Does he even try?"

"And that also is in my mind," acknowledged Tunis. "I'm pretty well fed up on 'Rion, I do allow. But I don't know what Aunt 'Cretia would say." Then he laughed again. "Just about what she usually says, I guess; nothing at all. But she abhors family squabbles.

"That reminds me, Ida May. This being the first Sunday I've been home since you came here, I

want you should go over with me after church tomorrow and have dinner at our house."

"Oh, Captain Latham! I——"

"And don't you guess you could employ some other term when speaking to me, Ida May?" he interrupted. "I get 'captained' almost enough aboard the schooner and up to Boston. Just plain 'Tunis' for those that are my friends suits me a sight better."

"I shall call you 'Tunis,' if you like," she said composedly. "But about taking dinner with you—I am not so sure."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Your aunt has never called here since I have been on the Head."

"She don't call anywhere. She never did that I can remember. She goes to church on Sunday sometimes. Occasionally she has to go to town to buy things. Once in a dog's age she leaves anchor and gets as far as Paulmouth. But other times she's never off the place."

"I—I feel hesitant about doing what you ask, Captain—Tunis, I mean."

"Why?"

"You know well enough," said Sheila. "If anything should turn up—if the truth should come out——"

"Now, are you still worrying about that, Ida May?"

"Don't you think of it—Tunis?"

"Not a bit! We're as safe as a church. That girl will never show up here on Wreckers' Head. Of course not!"

He seemed absolutely confident. In the dim illumination of the lantern she looked very closely into his face. Then it was not fear of exposure that kept Tunis Latham silent. She moved closer to him, looking up into his countenance, holding the lantern so that her own face was in the shadow.

"Who suggested my coming to dinner, Tunis? You, or your Aunt Lucretia?"

"If you knew my aunt! Well! She seldom says a word. But when I have anything to say, I talk along just as though she answered back like an ordinary person would. I can tell if she's interested."

"Yes?"

"She's been interested in you from the start, I know. She showed it in her look the very first time I spoke of you—that day I brought you here to Wreckers' Head."

"But—but you have never spoken of this before. She did not come to call."

"I'll tell you," said Tunis earnestly. "I wanted to be sure. Aunt 'Cretia knew your—er—Sarah Honey very well."

"Oh."

"Just about as well as Mrs. Ball did. When she

was staying here with Aunt Prue, she used to run over to our place a lot.

"You don't remember it," continued Tunis, grinning suddenly; "but you were taken over there when you were a baby."

"Oh, don't! Don't!" cried the girl. "Let us not speak so lightly—so carelessly. Suppose—suppose——"

"Suppose nothing!" exclaimed Tunis. "Don't have any fears. She wanted to know just how you looked—every particular. Oh, she has ways of showing what she wants without getting what you'd call voluble! I told her about your hair—your eyes—everything. I know from the way she looked that she accepts the fact of your being the real Ida May without more question than Cap'n Ira and Aunt Prue."

She was silent, thinking. Then she sighed.

"I will accept the invitation, Tunis. But I feel—I feel that all is not for the best. But what must be must be. So—oh, I'll go!"

CHAPTER XVI

MEMORIES—AND TUNIS

THE benison of that most beautiful season of all the year, the autumn, lay upon Wreckers' Head and the adjacent coast on that Sunday morning. Alongshore there is never any sad phase of the fall. One reason is the lack of deciduous trees. The brushless hills and fields are merely turned to golden brown when the frosts touch them.

The sea—ever changing in aspect, yet changeless in tide and restraint—was as bright and sparkling as at midsummer. Along the distant beaches the white ruffle of the surf seemed to have just been laundered. The green of the shallows and the blue of the deeper sea were equally vivid.

When she first arose Sheila Macklin looked abroad from that favorite north window of her bedroom, and saw that all the world was good. If she had felt secret misgivings and the tremor of a nervous apprehension, these feelings were sloughed

away by this promising morning. The fear she had expressed to Tunis Latham the evening before did not obsess her. She continued placid and outwardly cheerful. Whatever threatened in the immediate future, she determined to meet it with as much composure as she could summon.

Nobody but Sheila Macklin knew wholly what she had endured since leaving her childhood's home. When Tunis Latham had come so dramatically into her life she had been almost at the limit of her endurance. To him, even, she had not confessed all her miseries. To escape from them she would have embraced a much more desperate expedient than posing as Ida May Bostwick.

The ethics of the situation had not really impressed her at first. The desire to get away from her unfortunate environment, from the city itself, and to go where nobody knew her history, not even her name, was the main thought at that time in the girl's mind. Tunis Latham's confident assurances that she would be accepted without question by Cap'n Ball and Prudence caused her to put aside all fear of consequences at the moment. It was a desperate stroke, but she had been in desperate need, and she had carried the matter through boldly.

Now that she seemed so securely established in the Ball household and was accepted by all the community of Big Wreck Cove as the real Ida May, it

seemed foolish to give way to anxiety. Discovery of the imposture was remote.

Yet, as she had hinted to Tunis, she had an undercurrent of feeling—a more-than-faint apprehension—that all was not right. Something was lurking in the shadows of the future which menaced their peace and security.

She was ever mindful of the fact that Tunis had gone sponsor for her identity as Ida May. Should her imposture be revealed, her first duty would be to protect him. How could she do this? What tale could she concoct to make it seem that he was as much duped as were Cap'n Ball and Prudence?

This seemed impossible. She saw no way out. He had met the real Ida May Bostwick, and then had deliberately introduced Sheila Macklin as the girl he had been sent for! If the truth were revealed, what explanation could be offered?

Had she allowed her mind to dwell upon this phase of the affair she would surely have revealed to those about her, unobservant as they might be, that she had a secret cause for worry. She must drive it into the back of her mind—ignore it utterly.

And this she did on this beautiful Sabbath morning. When Tunis came up to the Head to accompany the Balls to church—Aunt Lucretia did not attend service on this day—a very close observer would have seen nothing in the girl's look or man-

ner to suggest that so keen an anxiety had touched her.

This should have been Sheila's happy day—and it was. For the first time, the young captain of the *Seamew* linked his interest with her in a deliberate public appearance. Although she feared in secret the result of that appearance at church with Tunis Latham, it nevertheless thrilled her.

He harnessed Queenie after giving that surprised animal such a curry-combing and polishing as she had not suffered in many a day. Sheila rode with Prudence on the rear seat of the carryall.

"I'm berthed on the for'ard deck along o' you, Tunis," said the old man, hoisting himself with difficulty into the front seat. "If the afterguard is all ready, I be. Trip the anchor, boy, and set sail!"

As they passed down through Portygee Town the denizens of that part of Big Wreck Cove were streaming to their own place of worship. It was a saint's day, and the brown people—both men and women, ringed of ears and garbed in the very gayest colors—gave way with smiles and bows for the jogging old mare and the rumbling carryall. Some of the *Seamew's* crew were overtaken, and they swept off their hats to Prudence and the supposed Ida May, grinning up at Tunis with more than usual friendliness.

"Ah!" exclaimed Eunez Pareta to Johnny Lark,

the *Seamew's* cook. "So you know she of the evil eye, eh?"

"What do you mean?" asked Johnny. "That pretty girl who rides behind Captain Latham?"

"*Si!*"

"She has no evil eye," declared the cook stoutly.

"It is told me that she has," said the smiling girl. "And she has put what you call the 'hoodoo' on that schooner. She come down in her from Boston."

"What of it?" retorted the cook. "She is a fine lady—and a pretty lady."

"So Tunis Latham think—heh?" demanded Eunez fiercely.

"And why not?" grinned Johnny.

"Bah! Has not all gone wrong with that *Seamew* ever since she sail in the schooner?" demanded the girl. "An anchor chain breaks; a rope parts; you lost a topmast—yes? How about Tony? Has he not left and will not return aboard the schooner for a price? Do you not find calm where other schooners find fair winds? Ah!"

"Pooh!" ejaculated Johnny Lark. "Old woman's talk!"

"Not!" cried the girl hotly. "It is a truth. The saints defend us from the evil eye! And Tunis Latham is under that girl's spell."

Johnny Lark tried to laugh again, but with less success. Many little things had marred the fair

course of the *Seamew* and her captain's business. He, however, shook his head.

"Not that pretty girl yonder," he said, "has brought bad luck to the *Seamew*. No, no!"

"What, then?" asked Eunez, staring sidewise at him from eyes which seemed almost green.

"See!" said Johnny, seizing her wrist. "If the *Seamew* is a Jonahed schooner, it is because of something different. Yes!"

"Bah!" cried Eunez, yet with continued eagerness. "Tell me what it may be if it is not that girl with the evil eye?"

"Ask 'Rion Latham," whispered Johnny. "You know him—huh?"

The Portygee girl looked for a moment rather taken aback. Then she said, tossing her head:

"What if I do know 'Rion?"

"Ask him," repeated Johnny Lark. "He is cousin of our captain. He knows—if anybody knows—what is the trouble with the *Seamew*." And he shook his head.

Eunez stared at him.

"You know something you do not tell me, Juan?"

"Ask 'Rion Latham," the cook said again, and left her at the door of the church.

Those swains who had been "cluttering the course"—to quote Cap'n Ira—did not intefere in any way with the Balls' equipage on this Sunday at

the church. There was none who seemed bold enough to enter the lists with Tunis Latham. He put Queenie in the shed and backed her out again and brought her around to the door when the service was ended without having to fight for the privilege.

'Rion Latham, however, was the center of a group of young fellows who were all glad to secure a smile and bow from the girl, but who only sheepishly grinned at Tunis. 'Rion was not smiling; there was a settled scowl upon his ugly face.

"I cal'late," said Cap'n Ira, as they drove away, "that 'Rion must have eat sour pickles for breakfast to-day and nothing much else. Yet he seemed perky enough last night at the sociable. I wonder what's got into him."

"I'd like to get something out of him," growled Tunis, to whom the remark was addressed.

"What's that?"

"Some work, for one thing," said the captain of the *Seamew*. "He's as lazy a fellow as I ever saw. And his tongue's too long."

"Trouble is," Cap'n Ira rejoined, "these trips you take in the schooner are too short to give you any chance to lick your crew into shape. They get back home too often. Too much shore leave, if ye ask me."

"I'd lose Mason Chapin if the *Seamew* made longer voyages. And I have lost one of the hands already—Tony."

"I swan! What's the matter with him?"

"His mother says Tony is scared to sail again with the *Seamew*. Some Portygee foolishness."

"I told you them Portygees warn't worth the grease they sop their bread in," declared Cap'n Ira.

The two on the rear seat of the carryall paid no attention to this conversation.

"I'm real pleased," said the old woman, "that you are going to dinner with Lucretia Latham, Ida May. Your mother thought a sight of her, and 'Cretia did of Sarah Honey, too. Sarah was one of the few who seemed to understand Lucretia. She's so dumb. I declare I can't never get used to her myself. I like folks lively about me, and I don't care how much they talk—the more the better.

"Lucretia Latham might have got her a good man and been happily married long ago, if it hadn't been that when a feller dropped in to call on her she sat mum all the evening and never said no more than the cat.

"I remember Silas Payson, who lived over beyond the port, took quite a shine to Lucretia, seeing her at church. Or, at least, we thought he did. Silas began going down to Latham's Folly of an evening, now and then, and setting up with Lucretia. But after a while he left off going and said he cal'lated he'd join the Quakers over to Seetawket. Playing Quaker meeting with just one girl to look

at didn't suit, noway." And the old woman laughed placidly.

"Tunis says he understands his aunt," ventured the girl.

"Tunis has had to put up with her. But he can say nothing a good deal himself, if anybody should ask ye. That's the only fault I've found with Tunis. I've heard Ira talk at him for a straight hour in our kitchen, and all the answer Tunis made was to say 'yes' twice."

The girl did not find the captain of the *Seamew* at all inarticulate later, as they crossed the old fields of the Ball place and walked down the slope into the saucerlike valley where lay Latham's Folly. She had never known Tunis to be more companionable than on this occasion. He seemed to have gained the courage to talk on more intimate topics than at any time since their acquaintanceship had begun.

"I guess you know," he observed, "that most all the money Uncle Peke left me—after what the lawyers got—I put into that schooner. There's a mortgage on her, too. You see, although the old place will come to me by and by, Aunt Lucretia has rights in it while she lives. It's sort of entailed, you know. I could not raise a dollar on Latham's Folly, if I wanted to. So I am pretty well tied up, you see.

"But the schooner is doing well. That is, I

mean, business is good, Ida May. Other things being equal, I will make more money with her the way I am doing now than I could in any other business. My line is the sea; I know that. I am fitted for it.

"And if I had invested Uncle Peke's legacy and kept on fishing, or tried for a berth in a deep bottom somewhere, I would not get ahead any faster or make so much money. Besides, long voyages would take me away from home, and, after all, Aunt Lucretia is my only kin and she would miss me sore."

"I am sure she would," said the girl with sympathy.

"But all ain't plain sailing," added the young skipper wistfully. "I am running too close to the reefs right now to crow any."

"But I am sure you will be successful in the end. Of course you will!"

"That's mighty nice of you," he said, smiling down into her vivid face. "With you and Aunt Lucretia both pulling for me, I ought to win out, sure enough.

"You can't fail to like her," he added. "If you just get the right slant on her character, I mean, Ida May. Hers has been a lonely life. Not that there has not almost always been somebody in the house with her. But she has lived with her own thoughts. She reads a great deal. There is not

one topic I can broach of which she has not at least a general knowledge. I was sent away to school, but when I came home vacations I brought my books and she read them all.

"And she is a splendid listener." He laughed. "You'll find that out for yourself, I fancy. And I know she likes people to talk to her—when they have anything to say. Tell her things; that is what she enjoys."

In spite of his assurances, Sheila Macklin approached the old, brown house behind the cedars with much secret trepidation. Although Aunt Lucretia had a neighbor's girl come in to help her almost daily, she had preferred to prepare the dinner on this occasion with her own hands. And, perhaps, she did not care to have the neighbor's child around when the supposed Ida May came to the house for the first time.

They saw her watching from the side door—a tall, angular figure in a black dress. Her hair was done plainly and in no arrangement to soften the gaunt outline of her face, but there was much of it, and Sheila longed to make a change in that grim coiffure.

The woman smiled so warmly when she saw the two approach that almost instantly the girl forgot the grim contour of Aunt Lucretia's face. That smile was like a flash of sunshine playing over one of those barren, brown fields through which they

had passed so quickly on the way down from the Ball house.

"This is Ida May, Aunt Lucretia," said Tunis, as they reached the porch.

The smiling woman stretched forth a hand to the girl. Her eyes, peering through the spectacles, were very keen, and when their gaze was centered upon the girl's face it seemed that Aunt Lucretia was suddenly smitten by some thought, or by some discovery about the visitor, which made her greeting slow.

Yet that may have been her usual manner. Tunis did not appear to observe anything extraordinary. But Sheila thought Aunt Lucretia had been about to greet her with a kiss, and then had thought better of it.

CHAPTER XVII

AUNT LUCRETIA

THERE was nothing thereafter in Aunt Lucretia's manner—surely not in her speech—to lead Sheila to fear the woman did not accept her at face value. Why should she suspect a masquerade when nobody else did? The girl took her cue from Tunis and placidly accepted his aunt's manner as natural.

Aunt Lucretia put the dinner on the table at once. They ate, when there was special company, in the dining room. The meal was generous in quantity and well cooked. It was evident that, like most country housewives, Lucretia Latham took pride in her table. Had the visitor come for the meal alone she would have been amply recompensed.

But the woman seldom uttered a word, and then only brief questions regarding the service of the food. She listened smilingly to the conversation between Tunis and the visitor, but did not enter into it. It was difficult for the girl to feel at ease under these circumstances.

Especially was this so after dinner, when she asked to help Aunt Lucretia clear off the table and wash and dry the dishes. The woman made no objection; indeed, she seemed to accept the girl's assistance placidly enough. But while they were engaged in the task—a time when two women usually have much to chatter about, if nothing of great importance—Aunt Lucretia uttered scarcely a word, preferring even to instruct her companion in dumb show where the dried dishes should be placed.

Yet, all the time, the girl could not trace anything in Aunt Lucretia's manner or look which actually suggested suspicion or dislike. Tunis seemed eminently satisfied with his aunt's attitude. He whispered to Sheila, when they were alone together:

"She certainly likes you, Ida May."

"Are you sure?" the girl asked.

"Couldn't be mistaken. But don't expect her to tell you so in just so many words."

Later they walked about the dooryard and outbuildings—Tunis and the visitor—and Aunt Lucretia watched them from her rocking-chair on the porch. What her thoughts were regarding her nephew and the girl it would be hard to guess, but whatever they were, they made her face no grimmer than usual, and the light in her bespectacled eyes was scarcely one of dislike or even of disapproval. Yet there was a strange something in the woman's

look or manner which suggested that she watched the visitor with thoughts or feelings which she wished neither the girl nor Tunis to observe.

Late in the afternoon the two young people started back for the Ball house, taking a roundabout way. They did not even follow the patrol path, well defined along the brink of Wreckers' Head as far as the beach. Instead, they went down by the wagon track to the beach itself, intending to follow the edge of the sea and the channel around to a path that led up the face of the bluff to the Ball homestead. It was a walk the girl had never taken.

The reaction she experienced after having successfully met and become acquainted with Aunt Lucretia put Sheila in high spirits. Tunis had never seen her in quite this mood. Although she was always cheerful and not a little gay about the Ball homestead, she suddenly achieved a spirit of sportiveness which surprised the captain of the *Seamew*. But he wholly liked and approved of this new mood.

She had made herself a new fall frock and a pretty, close-fitting hat—something entirely different, as he had noticed, from the styles displayed by the other girls of Big Wreck Cove. And he was observant enough to see that this outfit was more like what the girls in Boston wore.

She ran ahead to pick up a shell or pebble that gleamed at the water's edge from a long way off.

She escaped a wetting from the surf by a scant margin, and laughed delightedly at the chance she took. Back against the foot of the bluff certain brilliant flowers grew—fall blossoms that equaled any in Prudence Ball's garden—and the girl gathered these and arranged them in an attractive bouquet with a regard for color that delighted her companion.

They came, finally, in sight of a cabin back under the bank on the far side of the little cove, where once Tunis had reaped clams while Cap'n Ira and the Queen of Sheba made their unfortunate slide down the face of the bluff. The sea was so low now that Tunis could aid the girl across the mouth of the tiny inlet on the sand bar which defended it from the sea. There was but one channel over which she need leap with his help.

The cabin captivated Sheila, especially when she learned it was no longer occupied. It had a tight tin roof and a cement-pipe chimney with a cap to keep the rain out. The window sashes had been carried away and the door hung by a single hinge. However, the one-roomed cabin was otherwise tight and dry.

"Sometimes fishing parties from the port come around here and camp for a day or two," explained Tunis. "But Hosea Westcott used to live here altogether. Even in the winter. He caught his own fish and split and dried them; he dug clams and

picked beach plums and sold them in town, or swapped them for what he needed. Sometimes the neighbors gave him a day's work."

"An old and lonely man, Tunis?" the girl murmured.

"That is what he was. All his immediate family was gone. So, when he fell ill one winter and one of the coast guards found him here almost starved and helpless, they took him away to the poor farm."

They went on around the end of the headland and walked up the beach toward the port. Before they reached the path by which they intended to mount to the summit of Wreckers' Head, they observed another couple going in the same direction, following the edge of the water on the firm strand. The woman was dressed in such brilliant hues that she could be mistaken for nobody but a resident of Portygee Town.

"That is the daughter of Pareta, who brought up your trunk when you came here, Ida May," said Tunis carelessly.

"But do you see who the man is?" she said, with some surprise. "It is your cousin."

"'Rion? So it is. Well," he added rather scornfully, "no accounting for tastes. She's a decent-enough girl, I guess, but we don't mix much with the Portygees. Although most of them are all right folks, at that. But fooling around those girls

sometimes starts trouble, as 'Rion ought to know by this time."

As they climbed the path, Tunis aiding his companion at certain places, the girl, looking down, thought they were being closely watched by the other couple on the beach. There was nothing in this to disturb her mind; a feeling of confidence had overcome her since her experience with Aunt Lucretia. Her present environment was so far from the scenes of her old pain and misery that it seemed nothing actually could disturb her again.

The peacefulness of the scene impressed Tunis as well. When they came up finally upon the brink of the headland they saw a spiral of smoke rising from one of the chimneys of the distant Ball homestead. The man pointed to it and, smiling down upon her, repeated a verse he had read somewhere which he knew expressed the hope she held:

"I knew by the smoke that so gracefully curled
Above the green elms that a cottage was near;
And I said, 'if there's peace to be found in the world,
A heart that was humble might hope for it here.' "

"That is pretty near right, don't you think, Ida May?"

"It is, indeed! Oh, it is!" she cried. "And my heart *is* humble, Tunis. I feel that God has been very good to me—and you," she added softly.

"I've been mighty good to myself," he responded. "Ida May, there never was a girl just like you, I guess. Anyway, I never saw such a one. I—I don't know just how to put it, but I feel that you are the only girl in the world I can ever feel the same toward."

"Tunis!"

He took her hand, looking so hungrily into her face that she, blushing, if not confused, could not bear his gaze, and the long lashes drooped to veil the violet eyes.

"You understand me, Ida May?" whispered the captain of the *Seamew* eagerly. "I don't know, fixed as I am, that I've any right to talk to you like this. But—but I can't wait any longer!"

She allowed her hand to remain in his warm clasp, and now she looked up at him again.

"Have you thought of what all this may mean, Tunis?" she asked.

"You bet I have. I haven't been thinking of much else—not since the first time I saw you."

"What? You felt—felt that you could like me that night when we sat on the bench so long on the Common?"

"My Godfrey, Ida May!" he exclaimed. "Since that time you slipped on the sidewalk in front of that restaurant and I caught you. That's when I first knew that you were the most wonderful girl in the world!"

"Oh, Tunis! Do you mean that?"

"I certainly do," he said stoutly.

"That—that you thought *that?* At very first sight?"

"I couldn't get you out of my mind. I went about in a sort of dream. Why, Ida May, when Cap'n Ira and Aunt Prue talked so much about wanting that other girl down here, all I could think of was you! I half believed it must be you that they sent me for—until I came face to face with that other girl."

Her face dimpled suddenly; her eyes shone. The look she gave him passed through Tunis Latham like an electric shock. He trembled. He would have drawn her closer.

"Not here, Tunis," she whispered. "But if you dare take me—knowing what and who I am—I am all yours. Whenever you feel that you can take me I shall be ready. Can I say more, Tunis?"

He looked at her solemnly. "I am the happiest man alive. I am the happiest man alive, Ida May!" he breathed.

CHAPTER XVIII

IDA MAY THINKS IT OVER

The *Seamew* sailed next day, short-handed. Not only had Tony, the boy, left, but one of the foremast hands did not put in an appearance. A grinning Portygee boy came to the wharf and announced that "Paul, he iss ver' seek."

Tunis knew it would be useless to go after the man, just as it had been useless to go after Tony. He had been unable to ship another boy in Tony's place, and when he let it be known among the dock laborers and loungers about Luiz Wharf that there was a berth open in the *Seamew's* forecastle, nobody applied for it.

"What is the matter with those fellows?" the skipper asked Mason Chapin. "They were tumbling over each other a few weeks ago to join us, and now there isn't an offer."

"Some Portygee foolishness," grumbled the mate.

"I wonder," muttered Tunis.

"You wonder if it's so?" queried the mate. "You know how silly these people are once they get a crazy notion in their heads."

"What's the crazy notion, Mr. Chapin?"

The mate flung up his hands and shrugged his shoulders.

"A haunt—a jinx—*something.* The Lord knows!"

"I wonder if it is a Portygee notion or something else," said Tunis Latham, his eyes fixed on the back of Orion, busy, for once, at the other rail.

"Whatever it is, Captain Latham," said Mason Chapin with gravity, "I suggest you fill your berths at Boston."

"Guess I'll have to. But the offscourings of the city docks! They will be worse than these Portygees."

It was not a prospect he welcomed. He well knew the sort of dock rats he must put up with if he wished to make up his crew with city hands for a short trip. The sea tramps who are within reach of coasting skippers are the same kind of worthless material that shiftless farmers must depend upon in harvest time.

Even the lack of one man forward, to say nothing of the cook's boy, made a considerable difference in the working of the schooner. 'Rion Latham loudly proclaimed that he was being imposed upon when he was forced to work with the captain's watch. He

had shipped as supercargo and clerk, he had! This treatment was an imposition.

"You know what you can do about it, 'Rion, if you like," the skipper said to him calmly, but aside. "I wouldn't want to feel that I was holding you to a job that you did not like. You can leave the *Seamew* any time you want."

"Huh! The rats will be doing that soon enough," growled 'Rion.

But he did not say this where Captain Latham could hear. It was Horry Newbegin who heard him.

"It strikes me, young feller, that if I quarreled with my victuals and drink the way you do, I'd get me another berth and get shet of all this." And the old salt wagged his head. "I don't get you at all, 'Rion."

"You wait," growled the younger man. "I'll leave at the right time. And if things go as I expect, everybody else will leave him flat, too."

"You're taking a chance talking that way," admonished the old man. "It's just as much mutiny as though you turned and hit the skipper or the mate."

"It is, is it? I'll show him!"

"Show who?" asked Horry, in some wonder at the other's spitefulness.

"That dratted cousin of mine. Thinks he owns the earth and sea, as well as this hoodooed tub of

a schooner. Gets the best of everything. But he won't always. He never ought to have got the money to buy this old tub."

"You said you wouldn't have her for a gift," chuckled the old man.

"But that don't make it any the more right that he should have her. And she is hoodooed. You know she is, Horry."

The old mariner was silent. 'Rion craftily went on:

"Look what a number of things have happened since he put this derned schooner into commission. We broke an anchor chain in Paulmouth Harbor, didn't we? And the old mud hook lies there to this day. Did you ever see so many halyards snap in your life, and in just a capful of wind? Didn't we have a tops'l carried away—clean—in that squall off Swampscott? And now the hands are leaving her."

"Guess you know something about that," growled Horry.

'Rion grinned.

"Maybe I do. I don't say 'no' and I don't say 'yes.' However, we've all got to work like dogs to make up for being short-handed."

"Nobody is kicking much but you," said the older man.

"That's all right. I've got pluck enough not to

stand being imposed upon. Them Portygees—well, there's no figuring on what they will do."

"I can see you are bent on making them do something that will raise trouble," Newbegin said, shaking his head once more.

"What do you expect? You know the *Seamew* is hoodooed. Huh! *Seamew!*' That ain't no more her rightful name than it is mine."

"I wouldn't say that."

"I would!" snapped 'Rion. She's the *Marlin B.*, out o' Salem. No matter what he says, or anybody else. She's the murder ship. If he sailed her over that place outside o' Salem Harbor where those poor fellows was drowned, they'd rise again and curse the schooner and all aboard her."

The old man shuddered. He turned his face away and spat reflectively over the rail. The tug of the steering chains to starboard was even then thrilling the cords of his hands and arms with an almost electric shock. 'Rion watched him slyly. He knew the impression he was making on the old man's superstitious mind. He played upon it as he did upon the childish minds of some of the Portygee seamen.

So Captain Tunis Latham did not arrive in Boston in a very calm frame of mind. Although he had no words with 'Rion, and really no trouble with the crew in general, he felt that trouble was

brewing. And the worst of it was, it was trouble which he did not know how to avert.

It was not so easy to fill the empty berth in the forecastle, even from the offscourings of the docks. It was a time when dock labor was at a premium. And short voyages never did interest good sailormen. In addition, knowing that the *Seamew* sailed from her home port, decent seafarers wanted to know what was the matter with her that the captain could not fill his forecastle at that end.

These men wondered about Captain Latham, too. They judged that infirmities of temper must be the reason his men did not stay with the schooner. He was, perhaps, a driver—too quick with his fist or the toe of his boot. Questions along this line were bound to breed answers—and answers from those members of the *Seamew's* crew who were not friendly to the skipper.

In some little den off Commercial Street 'Rion Latham had forgathered with certain dock loiterers, and, after that, word went to and fro that the *Seamew* was haunted. If she ever sailed off Great Misery Island, the crew of a run-under Salem fishing smack would rise up to curse the schooner's company. And that curse would follow those who sailed aboard her—either for'ard or in the afterguard—for all time. In consequence of this the only man who applied for the empty berth aboard the *Seamew* was more than a little drunk and so dirty that

Captain Latham would not let him come over the rail.

Nor could the young shipmaster give much time to looking up hands. He had freight ready for his return trip. It must be got aboard, stowed properly, and advantage taken of the tide and a fair wind to get back to the Cape. He had not been in the habit of going up into the city at all of late. If that girl behind the lace counter of Hoskin & Marl's had expected to see Tunis Latham again, she had been disappointed. Her warm invitation to him to call on her—possibly to take her again to lunch—had borne only Dead Sea fruit. He had accepted her decision regarding the Balls and Cape Cod as final and irrevocable. At least, he had had no intention of ever going back and discussing the suggestion again.

The possibility of the real Ida May Bostwick changing her mind and reconsidering her refusal to communicate with the Balls or visit Wreckers' Head never once entered Tunis' mind, if it had Sheila Macklin's. He had seen how scornfully the cheap little shop-girl had refused the kind offer extended to her by her old relatives. He could not have imagined her thinking of the old people and their home and Big Wreck Cove in any different way.

He was quite right in this. Ida May Bostwick never would have looked upon these several mat-

ters differently. The thing was settled. Born and bred in the city, she could not conceive of any sane girl like herself deliberately burying herself down on the Cape, to "live on pollock and potatoes," as she had heard it expressed, and be the slave of a pair of old fogies.

Not for her! She would not think of it. Indeed, this phase of the offer Tunis had brought her really made Ida May Bostwick angry. What did he think she was, anyway? In fact, she was inclined to think that that seafaring person had almost insulted her. Although she had deliberately spoken of him as her "Cousin Tunis" to the girls who were her confidantes in the store and to her landlady, who was likewise curious about him, Ida May Bostwick was much pleased by the thought of him.

Then she began to compare Tunis with the young men she knew in Boston. She knew that the young men she got acquainted with were either very light minded or downright objectionable. If any of them contemplated marriage at all, they knew it could not be undertaken upon the meager salaries they were paid. Marriage meant teamwork, with the girl working down-town just as hard as ever, and then working at night when she went home, and on Sundays, even if she and her bridegroom lived only in a furnished room and did light housekeeping.

Ida May Bostwick had a brain explosion one day

when she considered these all-too-evident facts. She said:

"I bet *that* fellow wouldn't expect his wife to stand behind a lace counter and take the sass of floorwalkers and buyers, as well as lady customers, all day long. Not much! He's a regular guy, if he is a hick. My gracious! Don't I wish he'd come back! If I ever get my claws on him again——"

Just what she might do to Tunis under those circumstances she did not even explain to herself. But she began to think of Tunis a good deal. He was a good-looking man, too. And he spent freely. Ida May Bostwick remembered the lunch at Barquette's.

It was true that Sarah Honey had been all Prudence Ball and Aunt Lucretia Latham and other Wreckers' Head folk believed her to be. But she died when Ida May was small, and the girl had been brought up wholly under the influence of the Bostwicks. That family had lacked refinement and breeding and graciousness of manner to a degree that would have amazed and shocked Sarah Honey's relatives down on the Cape.

Not that the girl thought of Tunis Latham's refinement with any wistfulness. She thought of his well-filled wallet, that he was something more than a common sailor, that he undoubtedly owned a good home, even if it was down at Big Wreck Cove, and that he seemed "soft" and "easy."

"A girl might wind him right around her finger, if she went at it right," Ida May Bostwick finally decided. "Some girl will. I wonder how long it would take to get him to sell out down there and live up here in town? My mother came from that awful hole, and she caught a city fellow. I bet I could do this, if it was worth my while. My goodness! Why not?

"There's property there, too. I wonder how much those old creatures are worth. And how long they will live. He spoke like they needed somebody because they were sick. Ugh! I don't like folks when they are sick. Ma was *awful*. I can remember it. And there was pa, when he was cripped with rheumatism before he died."

This phase of the matter fairly staggered Ida May Bostwick. She put the faint glimmerings of the idea out of her mind—or tried to. Yet that summer she kept delaying her vacation until all the other girls had come back and related all their adventures—those that had actually happened and those that they had imagined.

"Ain't you going to take any time off, Ida May?" they asked.

At last she said she expected to visit her folks "down on the Cape."

"You remember that nice-looking farmer that came in to speak to me that time and took me to lunch at Barquette's?" she asked Miss Leary.

"I know you *said* he took you there."

"Well, he did, smarty! He's my cousin—of course, not too close." And Ida May giggled. "Well, we've been corresponding."

"I hope it's all perfectly proper," grinned Miss Leary.

Ida May Bostwick stuck out her tongue. But she laughed.

"I've got a good mind," she said to her friend, "to go down and see that fellow's folks. They're well fixed, I guess. And the store pays you for one week of your vacation. I wouldn't lose much, even if it did turn out to be a dead-and-alive hole."

CHAPTER XIX

THE ARRIVAL

THERE was a driving road down past Latham's Folly and on across certain sand flats and by cranberry bogs to a small settlement where Prudence had a stepsister still living. This old woman lived with her granddaughter's husband's kinsfolk, who were so distantly related to Cap'n Ira's wife that the relationship could scarcely be followed.

"It takes us Cape Codders," remarked Cap'n Ira, "to study out the shoals and channels of kinship. It's 'cause we're such good navigators that we're able to do it."

"And now that we've got Ida May to harness up Queenie for us and look after the house while we're gone, and you feel so much spryer yourself, Ira, I don't see why we can't visit our folks a little," Prudence said.

He agreed, and they set off in high fettle just before noon, expecting to return before dark. Sheila

was upstairs dusting when, not long after the noon hour, she saw from one of the windows the spread canvas of the *Seamew*—there was no mistaking the schooner—making through the channel into the cove.

"Tunis is coming! Tunis is coming! Tunis is coming soon!"

Her heart sang the refrain over and over again. She fairly danced about the household tasks she had set herself to do while the old couple were absent. Now and again she ran to some point where she could watch the *Seamew*. The memory of Tunis' kisses were on her lips and in her heart. In the dusk of the previous Monday morning, when he was on his way to the port to take command of his schooner, the young shipmaster had held her in his arms at the back door there, and had told her over and over again of his love for her. Thought of that moment was an exquisite memory to the girl.

She saw the schooner drop anchor off Portygee Town, with all its canvas rattling down in windrows of white. She even saw the little gig launched. Tunis was coming ashore. He would soon be up the hill. His long strides would soon bring him to her side again—open-eyed, ruddy-faced, a veritable sea god among men!

She ran out a dozen times to gaze down the road and wonder what kept him. Then she turned her back on the road and spent the next half hour in

beating the dust out of all the parlor and sitting room sofa pillows and one or two of the covered chairs.

Peace, like the sunshine itself, lay over all of Wreckers' Head. Here and there a spiral of smoke rose from a chimney, and fowl wandered about the well-reaped fields. But not much other life was visible. The fall haze gave to distant objects a dimmer outline, softening the sharp lineaments of the more rugged landscape. Color and form took on new beauty.

It was all so lovely, so peaceful, that it was impossible that the girl should have dreamed of what was approaching. Since she had come her mind had not been so far from apprehension of disaster. Since Sunday, when she had wandered with Tunis along the shore, it had seemed to the young woman that no harm could assail her. She was secure, sheltered, impregnably fortified both in Tunis' love and in the situation she had gained with the Balls and in the community.

She knew, at last, that somebody was on the road, but she would not look. She heard the latch of the gate and the creak of its hinges. Somebody was behind her. How softly Tunis stepped! She thought that he was approaching her quietly, believing he could surprise her. In a moment she would feel his arms about her and would surprise him by

laying her head back against his breast and putting up her lips to be kissed.

But, as he delayed, she turned her head ever so slyly. It was not the heavily shod feet of Tunis Latham she saw. What she saw was a pair of the very lightest of pearl-gray shoes, wonderful of arch and heel. Above were slim ankles and calves incased in fiber-silk hose the hue of the shoes.

She flashed a glance at the face of the stranger, and her gaze was immediately held by a pair of fixed brown eyes. There were green glints in the eyes—sharp, suspicious gleams that warned Sheila, before the other uttered a word, to set watch and ward upon her own lips. Not that she suspected who the stranger was.

"Good afternoon," was her greeting.

"Is this where the Balls live?" was the demand, with a note in the voice which betokened both weariness and vexation.

"Yes."

The girl set down her bag and gave a sigh of relief.

"Well, I am glad! I thought I'd never get here. I never did hear of such a hick place! No taxi, of course, and not even a hack or any other carriage to be hired. I've walked *miles*. And such a rough road!"

The parlor settee and easy-chairs had just been

brought outdoors for their weekly beating and dusting. Sheila pointed to a seat.

"Do sit down," she urged. "It is a long walk from the port."

"You said it! And after riding over from Paulmouth in that dinky old stagecoach, too," went on the stranger, as though holding Sheila responsible for some measure of her discomfort. "Say, ain't the folks home?" She cast a sour look around the premises. "Gee! It's a lonesome place in winter, I bet."

"Did you wish to see Mrs. Ball?" asked Sheila, eying the visitor with nothing more than curiosity.

"I guess so. She is Mrs. Prudence Ball, isn't she?"

"Yes. Mrs. Ball and the captain have gone away for the day. I am ever so sorry. You wished to see her particularly?"

"I guess I did." The stranger looked her over with more interest. "Say, how old are the Balls?"

The abrupt question drew a more penetrating look from Sheila. The visitor certainly was not Cape bred. Her smart cheapness did not attract Sheila at all. There was something so unwholesome about her that the observer had difficulty in suppressing a shudder. Yet her prettiness was orchidlike. But there are poisonous orchids.

"They are quite old people," Sheila said, finally answering the question. "Cap'n Ira is over seventy

and Prudence is not far from that age. You—you are not acquainted with them?"

"I never saw 'em. But I've heard a lot about 'em," said the stranger, with a light laugh. "They are sort of relations of mine."

"You are a relative?" asked the girl. Even then she had no thought of who this newcomer was. "Cap'n Ira's relative? Or Mrs. Ball's, if I may ask?"

"Well, I guess it is the old woman's. But I'm kind of curious to see 'em first, you know, before I make any strong play in the relationship game. Gee! Is this the parlor furniture?"

"Some of it," was the wondering rejoinder.

"Looks like the house, don't it? Down at the heel and shabby. Say, have they got much money, after all—them Balls? You're a neighbor, I suppose? You must know 'em well."

"I live here," said the other girl rather sternly.

"Huh? You mean around here?"

"I live here with Cap'n Ira and Mrs. Ball," was the further explanation.

"You *do?* You?"

Her voice suddenly became shrill. It rose half an octave with surprise. Her gaze, which had merely been insolent, now became suspicious. She scrutinized Sheila closely.

"I didn't know the Balls had anybody living with

'em," she resumed at length. "You ain't been here long, have you?"

"Oh, for some time," was the cheerful rejoinder.

"They hire you?"

"Not—not exactly. You see, I am sort of related to them, too."

"A relation of this old Cap'n Ira?"

"Of Mrs. Ball."

"Huh! Say, what's you name?"

"My name is Bostwick," was the composed reply. "You did not mention yours, did you?"

"Bostwick?"

"They call me Ida May Bostwick," said Sheila, demurely smiling, and even then without a suspicion of the vortex into which she was being drawn.

"Ida May Bostwick!"

The visitor rose out of her seat as though a spring had been released under her. Her eyes flattened, distended, and sparked like micaceous rock in the dark. Her hands clenched till the pointed, highly polished nails bit into the palms.

"What do you say? *You* are Ida May Bostwick?"

At that moment Sheila Macklin saw the light. It smote upon her brain like a shaft from a great searchlight; a penetrating, cleaving beam that might have laid bare her very soul before the accusing stranger. She staggered, retreating, shrinking, but only for a moment.

The pallor that had come into her face left it.

Color rose softly under the exquisite skin and there came a haughty uplift of her chin. She stared back into the blazing, greenish-brown eyes of the other, her own eyes unafraid, challenging.

"Do you doubt me?" she demanded, with as much composure as though a secure position and a conscience quite at ease were hers. "Who are you?" In what way are you interested in my name or in my identity?"

"Why, you—you——" The visitor was for the moment stricken speechless. But it was the speechlessness of rage—of wild and uncontrollable fury. Then she caught her breath. "You dirty cheat, you! You stand there and tell me you are Ida Bostwick? You've got gall—you certainly *have* got gall!

"I'd like to know who the devil you are? Comin' right here. wormin' your way into a place that don't belong to you, gettin' on the soft side of my aunt an' uncle, I s'pose, and thinkin' to grab all they got when they die. Oh, I know *your* kind, miss!

"But I'll show you up. I'll let 'em know what's what and who's who. They must be precious soft to take a girl like you in and think she's Ida Bostwick. How *dare* you?"

She stamped her foot. She advanced upon the other threateningly. But the girl she had accused did not retreat. The flush of outrage and that haughty expression were still upon her countenance.

She spoke very firmly but in a voice so low that it contrasted the more sharply with the enraged squall of her opponent. She asked:

"Who are *you,* if you please?"

"You've cheek to ask me. I'd ought to spit on you, so I had! But I'll tell you who I am—and it'll hold you for a while, I guess. I am Ida May Bostwick. You know full and well you are makin' out to these rich relations of mine that you are me. I'll show you up, miss! I'll have you whipped —or jailed—or something. The gall of you!"

The other girl heard her with unchanging face. Somehow, that steady, unshrinking look gave Ida May Bostwick pause. It was she who recoiled.

CHAPTER XX

THE LIE

THE girl who had seized upon the chance of becoming Ida May Bostwick, and so escaping the horror and despair that enshrouded Sheila Macklin like a filthy mantle, stood after the first blast as firm as a rock under the torrent of vituperation and rage which poured from the other girl's lips.

The real Ida May—weak, save in venomous hate, unstable as water, as shallow as a pool of glass—could have joined issue in a hair-pulling, face-scratching brawl. She was of that breed and upbringing.

Sheila Macklin's very dignity held Ida May Bostwick at arm's length. With all right and title to the name and place Sheila had usurped, the new arrival was awed by the impostor's look. Following that first—and merely instantaneous—expression of horrified surprise at Ida May's announcement of her identity, this girl, who was so secure in the confi-

dence of the Balls and the community, proceeded to look down at the claimant of her achieved position with utter calmness.

It made the real Ida May almost afraid. Certain as she was of her own name and the assertion of her own personality, the bold and unshaken opposition confronting her in the very look of the impostor abashed Ida May Bostwick. After her first outbreak she was silenced.

"Do you really know what you are saying?" the girl in possession asked. "Are you aware that I am Ida May Bostwick? There certainly cannot be two girls of the same name, both related to Mrs. Prudence Ball. That is too ridiculous."

The other gasped. Though red and white by turn, from impotence and rage, her fury was quelled under the look of the more composed young woman.

"There are twenty people almost within call who know me and who can swear to my name and my assertions that I am Miss Bostwick," went on Sheila, with a calmness which both frightened and daunted the other. "Just why you should come here and make such a preposterous claim I cannot understand. Where do you come from? Who are you—really?"

Ida May stared, flaccid, helpless. For the time being all her rage, her rudeness, her amazement, even, drained out of her. For this impostor to face her down in this way; for her to claim Ida May's name and identity with such utter calm—such sang-

froid; for Sheila to stand before her and deliberately declare that what Ida May had known to be her own all her life long—her name and distinctive character—was actually another's—all this was so monstrous a thing that Ida May was stunned.

Suppose—suppose something had really happened to her mind? People did go mad, Ida May had heard. She had rather a vague idea as to what insanity was like, but she felt her mind slipping.

The sure and unafraid expression of the other girl's countenance gave Ida May no help at all. She was sure that her opponent had not lost her mind. She was just a wicked, bad, horrid girl who had somehow got something that belonged to Ida May Bostwick, and meant to keep it if she could.

Self-pity filled the visitor's mind in place of the fury she had expended in her first outburst. She dared not attack the other with tooth and nail, for she saw now that this girl was as much her superior in physical strength as she was in strength of character.

Therefore, Ida May fell back upon tears. She blubbered right heartily, and, being really weary after her walk from the port, she fell back into the spring rocker, which squeaked almost as protestingly as she did, put her beringed hands before her face, and gave herself to grief.

Sheila Mackin's expression did not change. She revealed no sympathy for Ida May Bostwick. If

she felt sympathy, it was for that girl who had been persecuted, unfairly accused of stealing, sent to a place worse than prison, afterward branded with the stigma of "jailbird"; that girl whom Tunis Latham had befriended, had rescued from a situation which she could not think of now without a feeling of creeping horror.

Was she going to give over without a fight to this new claimant a place which had been and still was her only refuge? It could not be expected that she would do this. She had had no warning of this catastrophe. There had been no opportunity to prepare for a situation which must have shocked her terribly in any case. But if she had only had time——

Time? Time for what? To run away? Or to prepare the Balls, for instance, for the coming of this new claimant? And who knew this girl who said she was Ida May Bostwick? Sheila Macklin was fully aware of the history of Sarah Honey, of her marriage which had quite cut her off from her Cape Cod friends, and of the little that was known at Big Wreck Cove about her daughter, who, since babyhood, had never been seen here.

How was one to be sure if this were really the right Ida May? If one girl could make the claim and carry it through so easily, why not another? How could this girl, crying in the rocking-chair, prove her statement that she was Mrs. Ball's niece?

These thoughts seethed in Sheila Macklin's brain. She must keep cool! She must hold herself down, keep control of her own mind, and keep the whip hand of this girl before her.

And, then, there was Tunis to think of. The appearance of the real Ida May Bostwick wrecked all her happiness, of course, with Tunis. Sheila could not let him continue his association with her. Yet what course should she pursue to save him? That suddenly became the first consideration in Sheila Macklin's mind.

How to do this? How to save Tunis from being overwhelmed by the result of his own ill-considered deed? Impulse and love on Tunis Latham's part had brought about this terrible situation. Not that the girl blamed him in the least. Her thought was to protect the captain of the *Seamew* from being sucked into the whirlpool which she clearly beheld beside her path.

Save Tunis! It must be done. This little, inconsequential, weak-minded, loose-lipped girl must not be allowed to wreck Tunis Latham's life. If people came to accept as true the tale the girl could relate, Tunis' reputation would be smirched utterly in the opinion of all Big Wreck Cove folk.

Much as Sheila Macklin felt that her own happiness with Tunis was now impossible—a flash of Aunt Lucretia made this realization the more poignant—he must be sheltered from any folly regarding

this thing. She knew well his impulsive, generous nature. Who had a fuller knowledge of it than she?

She must think and act for herself, without any conference with Tunis. But she must do the only thing, after all, that would balk this wretched girl from the city—for a time, at least.

The real Ida May Bostwick had no friends here and no acquaintances among the people of Big Wreck Cove. It would be no easy matter for her to establish either credit or the fact of her identity in the community. It would take time and perhaps be very difficult for Ida May to bring forward conclusive evidence that would convince the Balls, or anybody else, of her real personality and prove that the girl in possession was an impostor.

All the latter had to do was to maintain her already-accepted standing, deny the true Ida May's claim, and demand that the latter show proof of her apparently preposterous statement. At least, some considerable delay must ensue through Sheila's course before the girl could convince anybody that she only claimed what was her own.

Nor need the battle end there. Ida May Bostwick might find it very difficult to prove to the satisfaction of all concerned that she was the actual niece of Prudence Ball. The very fact that Tunis had brought Sheila and introduced her as the girl he had

been sent for was proof so strong that it could not be lightly denied.

That phase of the matter—that Tunis was as deep in the conspiracy as she was herself—made Sheila Macklin desperate. She grasped at this only salvation—straw as it was!—for his sake more than for her own.

Later, when she was able to think and plan and plot again, she would evolve some method of rescuing Tunis from the results of his own impulsiveness and her weakness in accepting his suggestion as a way out of her personal difficulties. She should have known better! She should have scouted the idea at its inception!

She saw that this position in which she was placed was far and away more serious than that she had been in when she sat with Tunis upon the Boston Common bench. She had thought at that time that it needed little more to make her condition too desperate to bear. She would now, she felt, give life itself for the privilege of being back there and able to refuse the reckless plan of escape the captain of the *Seamew* had submitted to her.

She did not for a breath's length blame Tunis for the misfortune that had overtaken her—overtaken them both, indeed. She had accepted his plan with open eyes. In her desperation she had even foreseen the possibility of this outcome. She must blame nobody but herself.

But all these thoughts were futile. No use in considering for a single moment past situations and possibilities. She was confronted by a grim and adamant present! And that grim present was in the person of a girl with tear-streaked face who looked up at her, sobbing.

"You're the meanest girl I ever heard of. I'll pay you for this. Think of the gall of you comin' here and tellin' my rich relations you was me. I never heard of such a thing! It beats the movies, and and I thought they was just lies. Gee, but you must be a regular crook! I expect the very clothes you got on my aunt bought and gave you. I'll put you where you belong!"

"And suppose I put you where you seem to belong?" interrupted the girl in possession. "There is such a place as an insane hospital in this county, I believe. I think you must have either escaped from such a place, or that you belong in one."

"Oh!" gasped the other girl, staring up at her amazedly and not a little terrified by Sheila's emphatic speech.

"If you really are some distant relative of the family," the latter continued, "Mrs. Ball may wish to see you. Come into the house and I will make you a cup of tea. You need it. And you can wait for Mrs. Ball and the captain to return, if you like."

Ida May darted to her feet again.

"A cup of tea of *your* making!" she cried. "You'd put poison in it! You must be a wicked girl—anybody can see that. I wouldn't put anything bad past you. I guess them stories in the movies ain't so much lies, after all.

"I want nothing from you, whoever you are, only my name back and the chance you have grabbed off here. I'll go to the neighbors about it. I'll tell 'em what you've done. I guess I can find somebody to believe me."

Her abrupt halt warned Sheila that there was somebody approaching. Before she could turn to see who it was, the other girl ejaculated:

"My goodness! What is it—a junk wagon? Look at that horse, will you! Say! who's these folks? What a pair of old dubs!"

Cap'n Ira and Prudence had returned somewhat earlier than Sheila had expected. Old Queenie came up the lane and turned in at the open gateway beyond the garden.

The new girl tugged excitedly at Sheila's arm.

"Say! Who are they?" she demanded huskily.

"This is Cap'n Ball and Mrs. Ball," was the reply, and the girl in possession hurried forward to help them out of the carriage.

"Ahoy, Ida May!" the captain hailed cheerfully. "What's the good word?"

He prepared to climb down. The girl assisted Prudence first.

"Who's that with you, Ida May?" asked the old woman. Then, with keener eyes than the captain, she observed the change in the girl's face. "What's happened? Something has gone wrong, Ida May, I know. What is it?"

"That—that girl——"

Sheila almost choked. How could she prevaricate to the good old woman who had been so kind to her?

"Who is she, Ida May?"

"She says she is your niece," whispered the girl.

"My niece? Land's sake! I ain't got no niece but you, Ida May. Say, Ira, do you know this young woman? She ain't none o' your relations, is she?"

Cap'n Ira came to the ground finally with a thump of his cane. He straightened up and started at the new arrival.

"Red-headed, I swan!" he muttered. "Never was a Ball that I know of with that color topknot. And she looks like one o' these sandpipers ye see along shore. Look at that hat!"

"Ida May says she claims to be our niece," Prudence told him.

"I swan! I told you we was gettin' mighty popular."

Sheila, her limbs now trembling so that she feared she would fall, took Queenie by the head and backed

the carriage around. The old mare would have to be put in her stall and the carryall run under cover. But the girl was fearful of moving out of earshot.

Cap'n Ira and Prudence approached the real Ida May. The latter had been staring at them, marveling. Unlike Sheila, almost everything that Ida May Bostwick thought was advertised upon her face.

"My goodness!" considered Ida May. "What a pair of hicks!"

"You was lookin' for somebody named Ball, I cal'late?" Cap'n Ira said within Sheila's hearing as she led the gray mare away.

She could not catch the reply. Whatever the real Ida May said, she could not stand by to deny it. Besides, the matter must rest for the present on the evidence, and she did not know yet how much proof Ida May might be able to advance to strengthen her case. If it rested upon mere assertion, then Sheila need merely deny its truth and hold her own!

And, frightened as she was, that was exactly what Sheila intended to do. For the sake of Tunis, as well as for her own salvation, she must stand up against the new girl and hold by her own first claim —that she was the girl the Balls had sent Tunis for.

CHAPTER XXI

AT SWORDS' POINTS

Sheila Macklin got Queenie to the stable and unharnessed her. She ran the carryall into the barn and then closed the big door for the night, although the sun was still an hour high. She stopped to fling grain to the poultry, too. These chores she did with the thought in her mind that she might never do them again for Cap'n Ira and Prudence.

If that girl could prove her claim, if she could satisfy the old people that they had been cheated by Sheila and Tunis Latham, they might be indignant enough to put her right out—to-night!

The trio had disappeared into the house. She heard voices from the sitting room. But she wanted to return the furniture to the front room and finish the task which the real Ida May's coming had interrupted.

She had been strong enough when she carried the chairs and the settee into the yard, but she

could scarcely get them back again. The strength seemed to have deserted her arms. She staggered in with the last article of furniture and set it in place.

The murmur of voices from the room across the hall was steady. What were they saying? What had Ida May told them? How were the Balls taking it? Could that cheap, little thing convince the old people that she was their niece and that the girl they had come to love and trust was an impostor? Sheila Macklin's heart bled for Cap'n Ira and Prudence!

If she must go and they took this other girl in her place, would they be happy? And they had been happy during these last months! Would they not miss her if she left them to the mercy of this new claimant?

Yes, Sheila loved Cap'n Ira and Prudence. She loved them as though they were her very own! Not since her father had died had the girl been so fond of anybody—except Tunis, of course. And what would Tunis say when he came?

What would he expect her to do? To admit the truth of Ida May's claim and give up without a battle? If she did this, she would expose him as well as herself to infamy. It was a situation that would have appalled a person of much stronger character than Sheila Macklin, and she was no weakling.

No! She could not give up—not without a strug-

gle. As she had first decided, she must confront the new girl boldly and deny, if she could, any claim Ida May Bostwick put forward. She must do this for Tunis even more than for herself.

She arose determinedly. With this thought, strength surged back into her limbs as well as into her mind. For a time she had been weak, undecided. Once more she gathered her energies to oppose the sea of adversity which threatened to overwhelm her.

She crossed the hall and opened the sitting room door. Cap'n Ira sat in his usual chair, leaning forward, with his hands clasped over the knob of his cane. Prudence, with a wondering look on her face, sat beside him, and just as far from the new girl as the length of the room would allow. The latter had been speaking with her usual vehemence, and she did not even glance at Sheila when the latter came quietly into the room.

"Oh, Ida May!" gasped Prudence, and almost ran to her. "Do you know what she is saying? I never heard of such a thing!"

"I tell you she *ain't* Ida Bostwick," cried the other. "Don't you dare call her that. I'll——"

"Hoity-toity, young woman! Avast there!" said the captain gruffly. "We won't get to the rights of this by quarreling. Wait!"

He looked at Sheila, and his weatherhued countenance was as kindly of expression as usual.

"You know what this young woman says?" he asked.

Sheila nodded, but she held Prudence closely. The old woman was sobbing.

"This won't do, you know," said Cap'n Ira. "I swan! It beats my time. I expect you've got friends somewhere, young woman, and you ought to be given into their charge. I'm real sorry for you, but what you say don't sound sensible. Ain't you made a mistake? I cal'late you heard about us and Ida May——"

"I tell you," cried the girl, starting to her feet again, the brown eyes flashing spitefully, "that that thing there is an impostor. She's got my place. She's took my name. Why, I'll—I'll have her arrested. Ain't there no police in this awful place?"

"There's a constable all right," said Cap'n Ira calmly. "But I wouldn't want to call him in. Not just now, anyway. It looks to me you wanted a doctor more than you wanted a constable."

"You think I'm crazy!" gasped Ida May.

"Well, it looks as though you was a leetle off your course," the old man told her calmly. "You don't talk with sense, to say the least. Making the claim you do would make most anybody think you was a little flighty. Yes, a little flighty, to say the least." And he wagged his head.

"Look here," he pursued soothingly. "Have you been sick, perhaps? You ain't quite yourself, be ye?

I knowed a feller once that thought he was the angel Gabriel and went around with a tin fish horn, tooting it at all hours of the day and night. But no graves opened for him and nobody was resurrected. They finally put him in the booby hatch, poor feller."

"I'm your niece, I tell you," interrupted Ida May, pointing at Prudence, who shrank from her immediately in undeniable fear. "My mother was Sarah Honey before she was married. I guess there must be enough people in this Big Wreck Cove place who knew her and remember her to prove who I am."

"I wouldn't try to do that," said Cap'n Ira thoughtfully. "Telling such a thing as this among the neighbors would be the surest way of getting into trouble. That's right. If Prudence—Mrs. Ball—don't know ye, do you think strangers would be likely to back you up? Don't you think it would be better to sit down quietly and rest a while? Maybe you'd better stay with us overnight."

"Oh, Ira!" gasped his wife. "I wouldn't scurce dare have her stay. She—she's out of her head. She might do something."

"I'll do something fast enough!" cried Ida May, stamping her foot. "I'll do something to that hussy!"

"You hear her, Ira?" murmured Prudence, trying to draw Sheila away from the enranged girl.

"Threatening damage never broke no bones yet," said the captain calmly.

"I'll do *her* some damage," declared Ida May bitterly. "If none of you won't listen to me, I'll find somebody that will. I'll——"

She halted suddenly in her wild and angry speech. Her face changed as if by magic. The flush died in it and the expression of her sparkling eyes became subdued. A simpering look overspread Ida May Bostwick's countenance that warned the other girl, at least, that another person had entered the house.

Before Sheila could turn to look toward the kitchen door, Ida May cried:

"Oh, Cousin Tunis! If you ain't my cousin exactly, I guess you are pretty near. And ain't I glad you've come! Do you know what this awful girl is saying—what she is doing here? And these old fools won't believe me! I never heard of such a thing. Just you tell them who I am, and I guess they'll make her pack up and get out in a hurry."

In the doorway stood the captain of the *Seamew*. The two old people welcomed his appearance with a satisfaction that could not be mistaken.

"I swan, Tunis, you come at a mighty handy time," declared Cap'n Ira.

"Oh, Tunis! Take that girl away," cried Prudence faintly, pointing at Ida May.

The most difficult thing Sheila Macklin had ever done in all her life was what she did now. To act

and speak a deliberate falsehood before Tunis Latham!

She disengaged herself from Prudence, and before the simpering Ida May could speak again Sheila ran to him. In her face was, for the moment, all the fear and horror of the situation which she felt. It was a warning to him, and he was acute enough to understand it even before she spoke.

"Oh, Tunis! This girl must be beside herself. She says her name is Ida May Bostwick and that she is Mrs. Ball's niece."

Involuntarily Tunis had stretched forth his hands to welcome Sheila. He drew her closer without giving the Balls any attention whatsoever. One flashing glance he gave to the girl he held so gently—a look which was both a promise and a reassurance. Then he gazed over her head at the smirking Ida May.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded.

"Matter enough," said Cap'n Ira, not without marking, however, the attitude of the two young people he and Prudence loved. He even nudged his wife, who now stood close beside him. "Matter enough. That gal there, Tunis, seems to have lost her top-hamper. Leastways, some of it is mighty loose."

"Tunis Latham!" gasped the new claimant. "You know who I am. Tell that girl——"

She halted again, realizing the young man's expression of countenance and his attitude with the

other girl. She was quick enough of comprehension to see that this other girl had the advantage of her with the captain of the *Seamew* as well as with her relatives.

In Ida May's own artful mind she had decided that a smart girl could easily "twist that fellow around her finger." This girl who had usurped her name and identity had already succeeded in doing just that! The girl from Hoskin & Marl's halted, the wrathful flush came back into her pretty, insipid face, and she almost screamed:

"What's got into you folks? Are you all crazy? Why, that fellow knows who I am well enough! I bet he brought that girl here himself and palmed her off on you." She turned to blaze at Cap'n Ira and Prudence. "He picked her up somewhere—some low creature! But I'll show them both up; that's what I'll do. I'll make them both sorry for cheating me. I guess you folks have got a heap of money, and that fellow and that girl are trying to get it all. But they won't. I'll have my rights or——"

"Belay that!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira suddenly. "We won't listen to no more such talk. Whatever we have got—Prudence and me—and whoever you be, young woman, I cal'late we'll do about as we please with it. I think you have broke loose from them that had you in charge. And they ought to be

hunting for you. Leastways, I guess you'd better be sent back to 'em."

"I'm her niece, I tell you!" reiterated Ida May, pointing at Prudence, who shrank again from the vehement girl.

Then she whirled on Tunis. She clasped her hands. Into her rage was distilled some fear because of Cap'n Ira's grim words.

"You got to help me," she said to the younger man. "You know who I am, and you daren't deny it!"

No man can pace the quarter-deck—even of a packet of no greater importance than the *Seamew*—without having developed the sterner side of his character. And Tunis Latham came of a long line of shipmasters who had handled all sorts and conditions of men. If a skipper does not command the respect of his crew, he'll not get far!

The grim mask that had settled upon the countenance of the captain of the *Seamew* might have stayed the tongue of a more courageous person than Ida May Bostwick. His severe look and manner appalled her.

"See here, young woman, I don't like your tone; nor do I understand what you mean. Who do you say this is, Ida May?" he added more gently, looking down into Sheila's face again.

"She——"

"*I'm* Ida May Bostwick. You know I am!"

wailed the visitor. "Why—why, you must remember me, Tunis Latham. Don't you call her by my name. I won't stand it."

"Mad as a hatter! Mad as a hatter!" muttered Cap'n Ira to Prudence.

"There's something the matter with her, is there?" proceeded Tunis thoughtfully, eying the claimant as though she was indeed an utter stranger. "How did she get here? What does she want?"

"She wants a strait-jacket, I cal'late," said Cap'n Ira. "I don't know what is best to do about her. Prudence says she won't have her in the house overnight. 'Twould be too bad to have to put her in the town lockup."

"You *dare* to!" shrieked Ida May, with courage born of desperation.

Tunis put Sheila tenderly aside. He crossed the room to the other girl. He showed no manner of sympathy for her, but he spoke quietly.

"This won't do, you know. Mr. and Mrs. Ball don't want you here. You have no claim on them —none at all. Even if you chanced to be a relation, they have not got to take you in if they don't want to."

"They've taken that other girl in!" cried Ida May wildly.

"That is their business. They want her. They don't want you. You have no more standing here than you would have if you went into the house of

the governor of the State and demanded recognition there."

"What a wicked man you are!" gasped Ida May. "And—and I thought you was a simp!"

Tunis did not even change color. He addressed her as though he believed she was not right in her mind. Sheila watched him, not now in fear, but in wonder. She had thought she must battle with this girl for Tunis' name and reputation. But the captain of the *Seamew* had seized the reins of affairs himself and was likely to do much better in the emergency than Sheila could ever dream of doing.

"Come, now," said Tunis Latham calmly. "I do not know where you belong or where you came from last. But you cannot stay here. Cap'n Ira and Aunt Prue do not want you. If you have any friends near——"

"I've got friends all right! You'll find out that I've got 'em!" gasped the girl threateningly.

"You know anybody in Big Wreck Cove?"

"No, I don't. I've just come here. But I mean to stay here till I get my rights. I'll show you all!"

"You can't show us anything to-night," interposed Tunis firmly. "Whatever you mean to try to do cannot be done right now, you know. You will have to sleep somewhere, and I shall have to do one of two things—no, one of three things."

She looked at him wonderingly, but she was listening.

"I will take you back to the port. You cannot go home—wherever you live—to-night. In the morning you can go over with Ben Craddock on the stage to Paulmouth."

"I won't!" The girl's determination was roused. There was a stubborn streak in her character that would make her a bitter antagonist. Tunis, as well as Sheila, realized this.

"All right," said the captain of the *Seamew* calmly. "Then I'll get you a place to stay down in the port. Or I shall have to see the justice of the peace and have you committed for your own safety."

"You don't dare!" cried Ida May again.

"You tempt me too far, young woman," he said sternly, "and you'll find just how much I dare. Will you come along with me now and behave yourself?"

"That's the ticket, Tunis," muttered Cap'n Ira. "Put her where she belongs."

"So my own folks turn me out, do they?" cried Ida May, hatefully, staring at the two old people. "If anybody is crazy it is those two," and she pointed to the Balls. "Take in a drab like that girl and throw *me* out. Why, I believe I've seen her before. Somehow, she looks familiar," she added, her sharp gaze fixed on Sheila again. "Well, wherever it was, she was up to no good, I'll be bound."

"Are you coming with me willingly, and now?"

put in Tunis more harshly. "You are taking a chance, young woman, in talking this way."

"Oh, she's got *you* going. That's plain to be seen! I thought you was a nice fellow. But I guess you're like other sailors. I always heard they was a bad lot—running after women——"

"Will you come without any more words?" interrupted Tunis grimly.

"I'll have to go back to the town, I suppose. But remember! This ain't the end of this," she weakly blustered.

"This your bag?" said Tunis calmly, picking up Ida May's satchel. "All right. We'll go."

He did not attempt to look at Sheila again, nor at Cap'n Ira and Prudence. He walked behind Ida May, but rather hustled her out of the door. She might have cast back some final defiance, but he gave her no chance.

It was almost twilight when they went out at the kitchen door. They left the trio in the sitting room speechless for the moment. But Sheila Macklin's speechlessness arose through different thoughts from those of the Balls.

The girl left behind realized that this almost unexpected outcome was but the momentary triumph of falsehood.

CHAPTER XXII

A WAY OUT

"Ida May, you'd better sit down. You look like you'd had a stroke," declared the captain.

"Why wouldn't she, the dear child?" cried Prudence. "What do you suppose is the matter with that girl? Is she crazy?"

"Crazy ain't no name for it," her husband rejoined. "Her top-hamper is all askew, I cal'late. I never see the beat."

But just now Sheila could not endure any discussion of the strange girl. She rose as quickly as she had seated herself.

"I must fix supper," she said briskly. "You sit still, Aunt Prudence. You're flustered, I can see. There is nothing for you to do."

"That's right," put in Cap'n Ira. "Get a bite ready against Tunis comes back. He'll want something fillin' after handling that crazy gal."

He winked at Prudence and nudged her. The out-

standing incident for the old man was the unmistakable signs Tunis and Sheila had given that they were in love with each other.

"What did I tell ye when that gal first come here?" whispered Cap'n Ira hoarsely, when the girl had left the room. "I knowed that the hull generation here on the Cape hadn't been struck blind, not by a jugful! And it's evident to my mind, Prudence, that Tunis Latham has had his eyes pretty wide open from the first."

"Oh! I hope—it can't be that Ida May would leave us," murmured Prudence. "I don't mean to be selfish."

"Looks like we could get another gal easy enough if we wanted her," remarked the old man, with some bitterness. "I swan, Prue! S'pose Ida May had turned out to be the sort of a gal that flyaway critter is? We are blessed; we certainly are." And he treated himself to a liberal pinch of snuff.

Sheila did not wish to hear the two old people talk about the real Ida May Bostwick. When Tunis took the girl away it was an enormous relief. Of that she was quite sure. The malevolent attitude of the frustrated Ida May was sufficient to frighten anybody.

Shelia was positive enough that, as Ida May had promised, the matter was not ended. That venomous girl would not be content to leave Big Wreck Cove without making a further attempt—perhaps many

—to establish herself in her right identity and in what she considered her rightful place with the Balls.

Supper was late that evening. They were only just seated at the table when Tunis returned.

"Come on, boy," said Cap'n Ira. "There's a place set for you. Tell us what you did with that crazy girl."

Sheila was busy between the stove and the table and did not come to the side of the captain of the *Seamew* as he took the chair indicated. He was not smiling as usual, but neither did he seem alarmed. He replied to the questions of the old people with tranquillity.

"I did not advise her to go to the Burchell House," Tunis said. "You know what a talker Sally Burchell is. I remember that Mrs. Pauling took boarders in the summer, and I went to her with that girl."

"You mean Zeb's mother?" asked Prudence. "Well, she'll take care of her, I guess. And Zeb is strong and willing. If she gets crazy in the night, they ought to be able to hold her."

A faint smile flickered for a moment about Tunis Latham's stern lips.

"I don't guess she will act up so very bad with strangers."

"I swan! We was strangers enough to her, it would seem," exclaimed Cap'n Ira.

"But she seems to consider that you ought not to be," Tunis pointed out.

"Never heard of such a thing!" muttered the old man.

"I would have been glad to get her out of town this very night," Tunis observed quietly. "But it could not be done. She is convinced that she has what she calls 'rights,' and she proposes to remain and fight for them."

"I swan!"

"You will have to be firm with her. I explained to Zeb's mother what we thought was the matter with her. And I'll try to find her friends. She says she comes from Boston.

"Goodness gracious gallop!" exclaimed the old woman, more angry than frightened now. "She certainly can't stay here and tell those awful things she was saying about Ida May."

"I don't really see how we are going to stop her, right at first," Tunis rejoined. "Of course, if she continues to come up here and bother you, you can have her arrested."

"Oh!" gasped Sheila.

"Now, gal," said Cap'n Ira firmly, "don't you let your tender heart deceive you. That crazy critter ain't worth worrying about. She shan't be hurt. But I won't have her coming round here frightening you and Prudence. No, sir!"

"Quite right," said Tunis, agreeing.

"Oh, Tunis!" murmured the girl.

"But she will make talk. No doubt she will make talk," said Prudence in a worried tone. "We ought to stop her, somehow, from telling such things about our Ida May."

"Does she want money?" asked Cap'n Ira gruffly. "She talked as though she did."

"I think to offer her money would be the very worst possible way of shutting her up," said Tunis. "She wants to come here and live and be accepted as your niece."

"I never did!" gasped Prudence.

"She says nothing else will suit her. She seems to think she can prove what she had claimed. I think the best thing to do is to let her try it."

Sheila could not eat. She merely stared from one to the other of the three and listened to the discussion. In no way could she see a shadow of escape from ultimate disaster; yet she saw that Tunis was determined to fight it out on this line, to deny the stranger's claim and hold to what had already been gained for the girl in possession!

"Well," Prudence said, with a sigh, "I can see plainly it is going to stir up a puddle of muddy water. Unless she says or does something that makes the authorities take her and put her away, there will be them that will believe her—or half believe her."

"Let 'em talk," growled Cap'n Ira. "'Twon't be

the first time Big Wreck Cove folks got a mouthful to chew."

"But it will hurt Ida May," said Prudence, her voice trembling, as she squeezed the girl's hand and held it.

" 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me,' " began Cap'n Ira. Then he broke off in anger when he saw the girl's face, and exclaimed: "But, I swan! They'll keep you dodging, and that's a fact! Ought to be some way of shutting her up, Tunis."

"I don't know how that is going to be done. Not just at first, anyway. Perhaps something will turn up. And, anyway, she hasn't begun to talk yet."

"It's like being tied down to one o' them railroad tracks and waiting for the fast express to come along and crunch ye," grumbled the old man. "I know how Ida May feels. But you keep a stiff upper lip, my gal. You've got plenty of friends that won't listen to any such crazy notions as that other gal's got in her noodle."

In this manner the old folks comforted themselves in part. But nothing that was said could comfort Sheila. Tunis smoked a pipe with Cap'n Ira after supper, while the girl cleared off the table and washed and dried the dishes. Then he got her outside just after he had bidden Cap'n Ira and Prudence good night.

They walked away silently from the kitchen door

into the deep murk of a starless night. The moaning of a rising sea upon the outer reefs was the requiem of Sheila's hopes. One thing, she saw clearly, she must do. If she remained and fought for her place with the Balls, she must stand alone. Whether or not she held her place, she must not allow Tunis to be linked with her in this situation. As she slipped deeper and deeper into the morass, she could not cling to him and drag him as well into infamy and disgrace.

Away from the house, fully out of earshot from the kitchen, she halted. Tunis had taken her hand in his warm, encouraging grasp. She let it remain, but she did not return his pressure.

"Dear, this is dreadful," he whispered, "I know. But leave it to me. I'll find some way out."

"There is no way out, Tunis," she said confidently.

"Cat's-foot! Don't say that," he cried in exasperation. "There is always a way out of every jam."

This girl will do one of two things," said Sheila firmly. "Either she will prove her claim, or she will give up and go back to Boston. You know that."

"She'll fight hard, I guess" he admitted.

"Either way, Tunis," the girl pursued, "there is bound to be much doubt cast upon my character—upon *me*. If the truth becomes known, I am utterly

lost. If it is hushed up, I must go on living a lie—if I stay here."

"Don't talk that way!" he exclaimed gruffly. "Of course you'll stay here. If not with the Balls, then with me."

"Stop!" she begged him. "Wait! I am going to state the matter plainly as it is. We can no longer dodge it. This is the *truth* which we have been trying to ignore. I have not been foolish only; I have been wicked. And my greatest sin was in allowing you to link yourself with me so closely."

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"Just what I say. It was wrong for me to allow you to be friendly with me before the Balls and other people. I should not have gone to your house last Sunday. I should not have allowed you to introduce me to your Aunt Lucretia."

"Ida May!"

"That is not my name," she whispered. "Let there be no further mockery between you and me, Tunis. I have been wicked; *we* have been wicked. We must pay for what we have done. There is no escaping that. I must not keep you as my lover, Tunis. I was wrong—oh! so wrong—last Sunday. Reckless, wicked, drifting with a current, I scarcely knew where."

"My dear girl——"

"Now I see the rocks ahead, Tunis. I can shut my eyes to them no longer. Disaster is at hand.

You shall not be overwhelmed, as I may be overwhelmed at any time. I will not have your ruin on my conscience!"

"My ruin?" he repeated. "Ridiculous! My dear girl, you are talking like a mad woman. You cannot snap the tie that binds us. You cannot shoulder all the responsibility for this situation. The sin is as much mine as yours, if it is a sin. I'm in it as deep as you are."

"You must not be," she cried. "You can escape. You *shall* escape."

"Suppose I refuse to do so?" And he said it confidently.

"Tunis, I have thought of a way out for you," she cried suddenly.

"I don't want to hear it."

"But you must hear it!"

"I will not accept it."

"You cannot help yourself," she told him firmly. "Oh, I know what I am about! You may be angry; you will perhaps be laughed at a bit. But to be laughed at is better than to be scorned."

"What under the sun do you mean, girl?" he exclaimed, both startled and horrified by her determined words. "Do you think I would desert you in the middle of the current and swim ashore?"

"But I will desert you. I am determined to desert you. I refuse to cling to you, a millstone about your neck to drag you down. Ah, Tunis, whether

or not that girl makes her claim good, what you and I had hoped for cannot be! An explanation must be made of your part in this frightful affair. That, in itself, must separate you and me."

"What explanation? There is no such explanation that can be made. I glory in the fact that we are together in this, Sheila, and whatever comes of it, we stand or fall together!"

"Ah, Tunis, you *are* a man! I knew that before. But nothing you can say will bend my determination. I withdraw all I said to you Sunday and on Monday morning before you went away. I positively withdraw all I promised you. It cannot be, Tunis. We cannot look forward to any happiness when we began so unwisely."

"'Unwisely?' What do you mean?" demanded the captain of the *Seamew*. "Chance threw us together. *Providence,* I tell you! I needed you fully as much as you needed me. And surely these poor old folks needed you, Sheila. Consider what you have been to them."

"It makes no difference in our association, Tunis," she said, shaking her head.

"Why, that night we talked upon that bench on Boston Common, had I dared propose such a thing, I would have said: 'Come and marry me now.' I would, indeed, Sheila."

The girl clenched her hands and drew in a breath. She raised her face to his, and in the darkness Tunis

Latham saw it shine with a light from within. A great and desperate longing filled her voice when she cried:

"Oh, why didn't you do just that, Tunis Latham? I would have said 'yes.' And all this—*this* need not have been."

Swiftly she caught him around the neck, pressed her lips fiercely to his, while the tears rained down her face, wetting his face as well. Then she was gone. He heard her sobbing wildly in the dark. He was alone.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CALL UNANNOUNCED

Cap'n Ira and Prudence did not see Sheila again that evening, for she slipped in by the kitchen door after they had gone into the sitting room and went up to her own chamber. They heard her mount the stairs and marked the tread of her light feet overhead.

The girl was not thinking of the old people just then. Their need entered into her determination to remain if she could. But this night was one time when Sheila Macklin thought almost altogether of herself and her personal difficulties.

Her present and acknowledged love for the young captain of the *Seamew* had been of no mushroom growth. She might not say, as Tunis did, that she had fallen in love at first sight. But very soon after meeting the young shipmaster from Big Wreck Cove she had appreciated his full value and realized that he was far and away the best man she had ever met.

Indeed, in that moment when Tunis Latham had caught Sheila in his arms as she had slipped in front of the restaurant on Scollay Square, the girl's mind had been stabbed through by such a poignant feeling, such a desire to know more about him, that she was actually frightened by the strength of this concern.

She knelt before her north window with the frosty air breathing in like a balm upon her fevered body, and strained her eyes for a glimpse of the light that always burned in Tunis' window when he was at home. It was a long time before she saw it. For Tunis Latham had walked about the fields a long time after she left him, and it was late when he finally entered the big brown house behind the cedars.

Aunt Lucretia, who had been expecting him, after she had seen the *Seamew* heading for the cove that afternoon, was still sitting in the kitchen when her nephew entered. Composed as the man's features were, there was still an expression upon them which startled the woman. It brought her out of her chair, even if it did not bring an audible question to her lips.

"I was delayed, Aunt 'Cretia," he said. "No; nothing new about the *Seamew* or about business. It's—there's trouble up to the Balls'."

He knew her first thought would be for the health of the two old people, and he had to explain a little more.

"They are all right—Cap'n Ira and Aunt Prue. It's about Sh—Ida May."

"Tunis! Nothing has happened to the girl?"

He must take Aunt Lucretia into his confidence —at least, to some extent. Just how much could he tell her? How much dared he tell her?

From somebody, he felt sure, she would hear about this other girl who had appeared to claim kinship with the Balls and demand that Sheila give over to her the place she had with Cap'n Ira and Prudence. For Ida May Bostwick was going to talk. Tunis knew that well enough. Although he had warned her sternly that evening against talking, he knew well enough that after the girl had recovered from her first fright she would spit out the venomous tale that she had already concocted in her mind about Sheila and himself.

He could not bring himself to confess to Aunt Lucretia all the truth about his first meeting and subsequent association with Sheila. Indeed, he hoped he would never be obliged to tell it.

But he must tell Aunt Lucretia nothing but the truth. He did this by beginning at the coming of the real Ida May Bostwick to the Ball house that afternoon and her claim to Sheila's place with the family. As he told the story, Aunt Lucretia gazed upon him so fixedly, so intently, that the captain of the *Seamew* was disturbed. He could not understand her expression.

Perhaps he told the story haltingly of how Ida May had been turned out and he had taken her back to the port and housed her with Mrs. Pauling. He made few comments, however; he left Aunt Lucretia to draw her own conclusions. It was not until he had quite finished that she spoke again.

"That crazy girl, is she——"

"I don't know that she's crazy," said Tunis gruffly.

"It would seem so. Does she look like Ida May?"

Tunis started. The question seemed to probe into a matter that he had not before considered. But he shook his head negatively.

"Nothing like her," he said. "Reddish hair. Brown eyes—or kind of brown. When she's maddest there are green lights in 'em. Not nice eyes at all."

Aunt Lucretia nodded and said no more upon that point. What her question had dealt with in her own mind, Tunis could not guess. She watched his face, now pale and sadly drawn. Then she placed a firm hand upon his arm to arouse his attention.

"Tunis! This—this girl at Cap'n Ira's is something to you?"

"My God! Aunt 'Cretia, she's *everything* to me," he groaned, his reticence breaking down.

"Is she a good girl, Tunis?"

"As good as gold. On my honor, there was never

a nobler or better girl. I—I love her!" The words burst from him now in a great gush of emotion. These Lathams, when they did break up, often ran over. "I can't tell you the hold she has on me. If I lose her through this or any other cause, I'm done for!

"She thinks she isn't good enough for me. She is afraid of this girl who claims her place. She fears that I am going to be looked down on if I have anything more to do with her. And I tell you, if she was not the girl I know her to be, I would still cling to her. I must have her. I tell you, I must!"

Tears came to his eyes. His voice, hoarse and broken, carried to the woman's heart the knowledge that the one and overpowering passion of the man's life was rampant within him. What or whoever the girl at the Ball homestead might be, Tunis Latham was bound to her by ties which could not be broken.

She did the thing most generous; quite in accordance with her unselfish disposition. She stepped nearer to her nephew and put her arms about his neck. She kissed him. She gave no further evidence of doubt or disapproval. Indeed, when he left her to go to his room, he was assured that, however the world might look upon him, Aunt Lucretia was his supporter.

The girl in the Ball house saw the glimmer of his lamp that night for a very few minutes. There

was a day's work before him, and Tunis Latham, like other hard-working men, must have his sleep.

Sheila kept the night watches alone. She went to bed, but the lids of her eyes could not close. Sleep was as far from her as heaven itself. She went over the entire happenings of the previous afternoon and evening with care, giving to each incident its rightful importance, judging the weight of each word said, each look granted her. Did the Balls suspect her in the least? Had the story Ida May Bostwick told made any real impression upon their minds?

No! She finally told herself that thus far she was secure. Ida May must bring something besides assertion to influence the minds of the two old people. And if she had had documentary proof in her possession yesterday, the new claimant would have shown it.

Nobody carries about with him birth certificate or memoranda of identification and relationship. If Ida May had been warned of what she was to meet at the old house on Wreckers' Head, without doubt she would have tried to equip herself in some such way for the interview.

It might be very difficult for the girl to obtain any evidence that would assure the Balls of her actual relationship to them. Sheila had foreseen this possibility from the first. She was still quite determined to hold on, to make the other girl do all

the talking and all the proving. She herself would rest upon the foundation of her establishment in the place Ida May Bostwick claimed.

The latter certainly could not know Sheila's true history. Sheila was as much a stranger to Ida May as she had been to the Balls when Tunis had brought her to Wreckers' Head.

And then, suddenly, a thought seared through the girl's mind. Something that Ida May Bostwick had said just before Tunis hurried her out of the house!

"I believe I've seen her before. Somehow, she looks familiar."

These two sentences, spoken in Ida May's sneering way, had made little impression on the excited Sheila at the time they were spoken. But now they made the girl's heart beat wildly.

Suppose it were true! Suppose Ida May should really remember who Sheila was? It was not impossible that the girl from the lace counter of Hoskin & Marl's knew of Sheila's disgrace.

Sleep was not within her reach. The long hours of the night dragged past. Dimly dawn crept along the dark line of the horizon, circling all her world as far as Sheila could see it from her bed. But it was still dark below her north window when she caught the sound of a familiar step, the crunch of gravel under Tunis' boot.

She lay shaking for a moment, holding her breath. She heard the tiny pebbles rattle upon the window

sill. For the first time she had not been downstairs to greet Tunis on his way to the port. Could she let him go now without a word?

But she must! She must be firm.

Nevertheless, she slipped softly out of bed. The pebbles rattled again. She caught up a dark veil from her bureau and wrapped it about her face. She crept to the north window. The veil would mask her face so that he could not distinguish it in the shadow.

But she could look down upon him. She saw him standing there so firmly—so determinedly. His was no nature to give over easily anything he had set his heart on. All the more reason why Sheila should not appear to weaken.

She crouched there breathlessly as he tossed up more pebbles. Then she heard him sigh. Then he turned slowly away, and his feet dragged off along the path, and he went out of sight.

The girl crept back into bed. She hid her face in the pillow and dry sobs racked her frame. This was the hardest of all the hard things she had to do. She had wounded Tunis to the heart!

CHAPTER XXIV

EUNEZ PARETA

Tunis Latham went down the track toward the port as the dull dawn glimmered behind him in a frame of mind so dismal and despairing that more than Sheila Macklin would have pitied the captain of the *Seamew*. Against the tide of emotions which now surged in his heart he scarcely had the energy to battle.

Never had he felt less like approaching his usual tasks as commander and owner of the schooner and facing the trials he knew would meet him upon this coming trip to Boston. Freight was waiting upon Luiz Wharf, and he would be able to pick up the remainder of his cargo at Hollis, which, with the wind as it was now, he could reach that afternoon by four o'clock. Given good luck, he would warp into the T-wharf next day before nightfall.

The uncertain point which troubled him most was the matter of the crew of the *Seamew*. The Porty-

gees remaining with him—even Johnny Lark, the cook—had been in a most unhappy temper all the way back from Boston on the last trip. Tunis could depend upon Mate Chapin, Boatswain Newbegin, and 'Rion Latham himself to stick by the schooner. For, in spite of his quarreling and long tongue about a hoodoo, Tunis thought that his cousin was a man above any real fear of the very superstitions he talked about.

But four men could not safely work the schooner to Boston, nor in season to keep his contract with the consignees of freight which the *Seamew* carried. Troubled as he had been at Boston, and delayed, Tunis wished now that he had remained there even longer while he made search for and engaged a proper crew for the schooner. He had better, perhaps, have paid the fare of the Portygees back to Big Wreck Cove and so saved quarreling with them.

When he had been about to leave the schooner the afternoon before, the foolish fellows had sent a spokesman to him asking if he was sure the *Seamew* was not the old *Marlin B.*, the Salem fishing craft which had been acclaimed "the murder ship" from the Banks to the Cape by all coasting seamen several years before. To answer this question rasped the pride of the owner of the *Seamew.* For a seaman to ask a question of one of the officers —a question of such a nature—was flaunting authority in any case.

Although Captain Latham considered the question ridiculous and utterly unworthy of a serious answer, he had replied to it.

He had told the sailor that to the best of his knowledge and belief the old *Marlin B.* was several thousand miles away from the Cape at that time, and that the *Seamew* was herself and no other. In any case, he had said he had no personal fear of sailing in the schooner as long as he could keep a decent crew of seamen aboard her, but that he would stand for no more foolishness from his present crew.

Tunis had spoken quite boldly. But, to tell the truth, he did not know where or how he was to sign another crew and a cook if the Portygees deserted the schooner. Not at Big Wreck Cove. He had heard too many whispers about the curse upon his schooner from people of all classes in the port. Even Joshua Jones, who was supposed to be a pretty hard-headed merchant, had been influenced by the story 'Rion Latham had first told about the *Seamew*. He and his father had hesitated to give Tunis an order for another lot of freight now waiting on the dock at Boston. They wanted to be sure that the schooner was not going to sail from the latter port undermanned. Whether or not the Joneses believed in the hoodoo, they did know that if the *Seamew* sailed without a proper crew their insurance on the freight would be invalid.

So the farther Tunis walked down toward the

wharves, the more these thoughts assailed and overcame his mind, to the exclusion even of the tragic happenings back there on the Head the night before. He could not consider Ida May Bostwick—not even Sheila—now. The schooner, with her affairs, was a harsh mistress. His all was invested in the *Seamew,* and business had not been so good thus far that he could withdraw with a profit. Far from that! There were financial reefs and shoals on either hand, and that fact the young skipper knew right well.

As he drew near to Portygee Town, he glanced toward the open door of Pareta's cottage and saw the girl, Eunez, seated upon the step. She did not come out to meet him, as had been her wont, but she hailed him as he approached—though in a sharper tone than usual.

"So Captain Tunis Latham has still another girl? He is a lion with the ladies, it is plain to be seen. Ah!"

"You don't mind, do you, Eunez?" replied the young man, trying to assume his usual careless manner of speech. "You have the reputation of being pretty popular with the fellows yourself."

"Ah!" she said again, tossing her head. "Who is this new girl I see you walk with last evening, Tunis?"

"She is a stranger in Big Wreck Cove," was his noncommittal reply.

"So I see. They come and go for you, Tunis Latham. You are the fickle man, eh?"

"Tut, tut, Eunez!" he laughed. "Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. How about yourself? Didn't I see you going to church with Johnny Lark last Sunday? And then, in the afternoon, you had another cavalier along the beaches. Oh, I saw you!"

The color flashed into her dark cheek, and her black eyes reflected some unexplained anger. Beside her, leaning against the house wall, was the handle end of a broken oar. Tunis chanced to mark that there was a streak of dull blue paint on it.

"You have sharp eyes. Tunis Latham," hissed the girl. "Not all of the Lathams are too proud to walk with Eunez Pareta—or too proud to think of her. But *you*—bah!"

She got up suddenly, turned her back upon him, and entered the cottage. Tunis walked on, just a little puzzled.

Horry Newbegin sat on the rail of the schooner smoking, and evidently looking anxiously for the appearance of the skipper. There was no smoke rising from the galley chimney.

"What's the matter with cooky?" demanded Tunis briskly.

"The dratted Portygee's gone off to Paulmouth. He left word that he couldn't sail with us this trip."

"Then he'll never sail on the *Seamew* again," declared the skipper grimly.

"And *that* won't bother him none," said the boatswain gloomily.

"I'll get breakfast for all hands," said Tunis. "I'm not above that. Where are the hands?"

"As far as I know, Cap'n Tunis, they are where Johnny Lark is. Haven't shown up, and don't mean to," said Horry doggedly.

Tunis Latham cursed his delinquent crew soundly. The rage which flamed into his eyes, added to the pallor of his face, made an ugly mask indeed. It was not often that he gave way to such an outburst, but Horry had seen the same deadly anger displayed on occasion by Captain Randall Latham.

"Where's Mr. Chapin?"

"He was here before you, Cap'n Tunis. He's gone up to town to see if he can drum up some hands."

"Where's 'Rion?"

"He says he'll be here by the time you get ready to wheel the stuff aboard." And the old man pointed with his pipe-stem toward the open door of the shed.

"Ha!" ejaculated Tunis. "Feared I'd set him to work, eh? Well, they're all dogs together—the whole litter of 'em. I'll make the coffee. Tell me when Mr. Chapin comes. I suppose we can hire enough hands to get the freight aboard."

"But we can't work the schooner with three men, Cap'n Tunis; nor yet with four."

"Don't I know that? I'll get a crew if I have to shanghai them," promised Tunis grimly.

Mason Chapin came along with half a dozen fellows after a while. One was a negro who could cook. But there was no breakfast worthy of the name served aboard the *Seamew* that morning. They were late already in getting to work.

It was the middle of the forenoon before the schooner left port. There was a crew, such as it was. But Mason Chapin had been obliged to promise them extra pay to get them aboard the schooner at all.

When 'Rion Latham slipped aboard finally, half the loading of the cargo had been accomplished. Tunis himself was keeping tally. The skipper beckoned his cousin to him.

"'Rion," he said, "you certainly are about as useless a fellow as I ever had anything to do with. These Portygees who have left me in the lurch have some excuse for their actions. They are ignorant and superstitious. You know mighty well that the stuff you have been repeating about the schooner being cursed is nothing but lies and old-women's gossip! You've done it to make trouble. I ought to have had booted you overboard at the start."

"Aw—you——"

"Close your hatch!" ejaculated Tunis. "And

keep it closed. I'm talking, and I won't take any of your slack in return. I am not married to you, thanks be! I think you've got pretty near enough of me, and I'm sure I have of you, 'Rion. I give you warning——"

"Oh! You do?" snarled 'Rion, his ugly face aflame.

"Yes. I give you *fair* warning. When the *Seamew* gets back here to Big Wreck Cove again, you're through! You can take your dunnage ashore now if you like, but you go without pay if you do. Or you can do your work properly on this trip and return. *Then* you get through. Take your choice."

He expected 'Rion would leave the *Seamew* then and there. Tunis half hoped, indeed, that he would do so. But to his surprise, Orion suddenly snatched the book and pencil out of the skipper's hand and, growling that "he'd stay the voyage out," shuffled away to the rail and began taking tally of the barrels and cases being hauled aboard.

Working smartly, the new crew got the *Seamew* under sail and out of the cove two hours later. The wind held in a favorable quarter, and they reached Hollis betimes. There they finished the schooner's loading, and about dark went out to sea on a long tack and got plenty of sea room before they made the short leg of it.

Supper was the first good meal they had had aboard that day. After everything was cleaned up,

the black cook joined the crew forward. In whispers the men talked over both the skipper and his schooner. The story of the curse was known to everybody in Big Wreck Cove by this time, and none of these new men was ignorant of it. They had, however, merely used it as a means of getting more pay than ordinary seamen were getting in such vessels.

"'Tain't nothing as I can see," one of the older men said, "that is likely to hurt us. It's a curse on the schooner, not on us folks that warn't aboard her when she run under that other boat. And as long as we keep away from the spot where the poor devils was drowned, we ain't likely to see no ha'nts."

The cook's eyes rolled tremendously.

"You thinks likely this yere is that *Marlin B.?*"

"Bah!" exclaimed one, whose name was Carney. "It's only talk. Maybe she ain't that schooner at all. Mr. Chapin says she ain't."

"Is that so?" sneered the voice of 'Rion Latham behind them. "You fellows don't want to believe what the skipper and the mate say. It ain't to their benefit for you to believe the truth. Look here!"

"What's that?" asked Carney, looking at the article Orion pushed forward in the dark. "A broken oar?"

"That's what it is. I found it only this morning in the hold, when I was helping stow the last of the

cargo. It was wedged in behind a timber of her frame."

"Well? What of it?"

"Strike a match somebody. See what's burned into that handle?"

Their heads were clustered about the faint glimmer of the match flame. But the light was sufficient to reveal what 'Rion pointed out. Burned more or less unevenly were the letters M A R L I N B.

"What do you think of that?" exclaimed 'Rion. "Would that broken oar be aboard of this dratted schooner if she wasn't the *Marlin B.* painted over and a new name give her? What do you fellows think of it?"

There was silence in the group when the match flame died out. It was finally the negro cook who made comment:

"Lawsy me!" he groaned. "Ef I had only de faith of Peter I'd up an' walk ashore from dis here cussed schooner right now!"

CHAPTER XXV

TO LOVE AND BE LOVED

THE girl whom Cap'n Ira Ball found in the kitchen of the old house on Wreckers' Head when he hobbled out of his bedroom the next morning was not the Ida May he had been wont to find of late, ready with his shaving materials, hot water, and a clean and voluminous checked apron to be tucked in about the neckband of his shirt.

All was in readiness as usual, but the girl herself was smileless, heavy-eyed, and slack of step. That she had suffered both in body and mind since the day before, the least observant person in the world would have easily comprehended.

"I swan, Ida May!" gasped the old man. "Whatever's happened to you?"

"I did not sleep well, Uncle Ira," she told him faintly.

"Sleep? Why you look as though you'd been standing double watch for a week of Sundays! I

never see the beat! Has that crazy gal coming here set ye all aback this way?"

"I—I am afraid so."

"'Tis a shame. I won't stand to have that gal come here again. Prudence has been starting and crying out all night, too. She's as much upset as you be. I cal'late you don't feel like shaving of me this morning, Ida May."

"Oh, yes, I do, Uncle Ira! Don't mind how I look."

"But I do mind," he grumbled. "Folks' looks is a great p'int. I've always held to it. Talk about a singed cat being better than it looks—I doubt it!"

"People of my complexion always look worse after a sleepless night," explained Sheila, trying to smile at him.

"That's a pity, too. And I feel the need of being spruced up a good deal myself this morning, Ida May," he continued. "D'you see how straggly my hair is gettin'? Do you think you could trim it a mite?"

"Why, of course I can, Uncle Ira," she rejoined cheerfully.

"I swan! You be a likely gal, Ida May," said the old man, both reflectively and gratefully. "What would Prue and me do without you? And no other girl but just you would have begun to fill the bill o' lading. That's as sure as sure! See now," he went on, with emphasis, "suppose you'd

been such a one as that half-crazy critter that come here yesterday! Where'd Prudence and me been with her in the house? Well!"

"She—she may not be as bad as she seemed under those particular circumstances," Sheila said hesitatingly. "If she had come here—had come here first and you and Aunt Prue had not known me at all——"

"I swan! Don't say no more! Don't say no more, I tell ye!" gasped Cap'n Ira. "It's bad luck to talk such a way; I do believe it is. Come on, Ida May. You tackle my hair and let's see what you can do with it. I know right well you'll make it look better than Prudence used to do."

Cap'n Ira was talking for effect, and the result he wished to achieve was bringing a smile to Sheila's face and a brighter light into her eyes, the violet hues of which were far more subdued than he desired. His success was not marked, but he changed to some degree the forlorn expression of the girl's countenance, so that when Prudence appeared in the midst of the operation of shaving, Sheila could greet the old woman with a tremulous smile.

"You deary-dear!" crooned Prudence, with her withered arms about the strong, young frame of the girl, drawing her close. "I know you've suffered this night. That mad girl was enough to put us all out o' kilter. But don't let any thought of her bother you, Ida May. Your uncle and I love you, and if

forty people said you didn't belong here, we should keep you just the same. Ain't that so, Ira?"

"Sure is," declared the captain vigorously. "No two ways about it. We couldn't get along without Ida May, and I cal'late, the way things look, that I'd better get that high fence I spoke of built around this place at once. We're likely to have somebody come here and carry the gal off almost any time. I can see that danger as plain as plain!"

Prudence laughed, yet there was a catch in her voice too. She kissed the girl's tear-wet face tenderly. Sheila's heart throbbed so that she could scarcely go on with the task of shaving Cap'n Ira. How could she continue to live this lie before two people who were so infinitely kind to her and who loved her so tenderly?

And the girl loved them in return. It was no selfish thought which held Sheila Macklin here in the old house on Wreckers' Head. She had put aside all concern for her own personal comfort or ease. Had it not been for her desire to shield Tunis and continue to aid and comfort Cap'n Ira and Prudence, she might quickly and quietly have left the place and thus have escaped all possibility of punishment for the deception she had practiced.

Yes, had these other considerations not been involved, she would have run away! Although she chanced to have no money just at this time, she would have left the Ball homestead and Wreckers'

Head and the town itself and walked so far away that nobody who knew her would ever see her again. She had thought of doing this even as far back as the time when she was so lonely and miserable in Boston. Now, she would willingly have become a tramp for the purpose of getting out of the affliction which enmeshed her.

She could not, nevertheless, yield to this temptation. If she ran away from the Balls and Big Wreck Cove, she would tacitly admit the truth of all Ida May Bostwick's claims, and possibly involve Tunis in the wreckage. Therefore she held to her determination of keeping her place here until she was actually driven forth.

As a last resort, having now worked out the detail of that plan in her mind, she believed she could save Tunis from much calumny if it became positively necessary for her to depart under this cloud and abandon her place to the real Ida May. The latter must, however, come with positive proof of her identity—evidence sufficient to convince Cap'n Ira and Prudence—before Sheila Macklin would release her grasp upon what she had obtained by trickery and deceit.

Not for a moment did the girl try to excuse to herself what she had done. In spite of the Balls' need of her, and in spite of Tunis' love, Sheila did not try to deceive herself with any sophistry about

the end justifying the deed. Such thinking could not satisfy her now.

Sheila's eyes were opened. She beheld before her both the wide and the narrow way. If she took the pleasanter path, it was with a full knowledge of what she did. Yet would it be the pleasanter path? She doubted this. If she continued to fight for a place which was not hers by right, she must walk for all time in a slippery way. This claim of the real Ida May might be perennial; the girl might return again and again to the attack. For years—as long as the Balls lived and Sheila remained with them—she must be ever on the alert to defend her position with them.

And after the good old people died—what then? Their property here on the Head and their money would no more belong to Sheila Macklin than it did now. She shrank in horror from the thought of swindling the real Ida May out of anything which might legally be hers when the Balls were gone. Of course, Cap'n Ira and Prudence could will their property to whom they pleased. Still, Ida May was Prudence's niece!

As the day dragged on, Ida May did not appear, but the old folks talked about her continually, until Sheila thought she must cry aloud to them to stop.

"The poor thing must be half-witted, of course," Mrs. Ball said ruminatively. "Can't be otherwise.

But she must have known something about Sarah Honey and her folks."

"Seems likely," agreed Cap'n Ira.

"Now, you know, Ira, Sarah was an orphan and I was her mother's only relation—and only that in a kind of a left-handed way, for I wasn't really her aunt. That branch of the Honeys—Sarah's father's folks—had all died out. Sarah lived about—kinder from pillar to post as you might say—till she went to Boston and met Mr. Bostwick. Isn't that so, Ida May?"

"Yes. So I understand," agreed the girl faintly.

"Now, you don't remember your mother much, Ida May," pursued Prudence confidently. "You was too young when she died. And you being brought up among the Bostwicks, you didn't know much about us down here on the Cape. But don't you remember any neighbor that lived near you there in Boston that had a gal something like this crazy one that come here?"

"I swan!" ejaculated Cap'n Ira. "You're coming out strong, old woman, I do say."

Sheila could only shake her head.

"Why, see," said Prudence, encouraged by her husband's commendation, "there might have been a neighbor woman that Sarah—your mother, you know, Ida May—was close acquainted with. Maybe she used to talk with this neighbor a good deal about

her young days, and how she lived down here. You know women often gossip that way."

"I'll say they do!" put in Cap'n Ira, tapping the knob of his cane.

"Well, now," said the old woman, greatly interested in her own idea, and a little proud of it, "suppose that neighbor had a little girl who heard all these things Sarah Bostwick might have said. And if that child's brain wasn't just right—if she was a little weak-minded, poor thing—what's more reasonable than that she treasured it all up in her mind and after years, in one of her spells of weak-mindedness, she got the idea *she* was Ida May Bostwick, and determined to come here and visit us!"

"I swan, Prudence!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira. "It's like a story-book—a reg'lar novel."

"Well, it might be," said his wife, smiling quite proudly.

"Only after all, that gal didn't seem so very weak-minded," muttered Cap'n Ira. "She seemed more mean and ugly than weak."

Sheila had thought somewhat along this line herself. At least, she knew how weak the real Ida May's story must sound to most people in the neighborhood, unless the claimant had actual proof of birth and name to bolster her attempt to win the Balls. There was but a tenuous thread connecting Ida May with Big Wreck Cove, or any other part

of Cape Cod. The Bostwicks—the girl's immediate family, at least—were dead.

These facts, already gathered by Sheila from Aunt Prudence's conversation with the neighboring women, were the foundation on which she had built her desperate hope of keeping up the deception and thwarting the other girl, no matter how bitterly the latter might press her claim.

Nor was she, Sheila felt, depriving Ida May of anything which the latter, if she obtained it, would actually prize. The shallow girl was not the sort of person to appreciate the kindness of the two old people or give them any comfort and sympathy in return. Why, both Cap'n Ira and Prudence already shrank from the new claimant!

This fact, however, did not cause Sheila, the imposter, to lose sight of the point that Cap'n Ira and his wife could both be very stern in attitude and speech toward the evildoer. They made no compromises with evil.

Even the old man, philosophical as he was and wont to look upon most human frailities with a lenient if not a humorous eye, would not excuse actual crime. And something very like a crime had been committed.

The day passed without any reappearance of Ida May upon Wreckers' Head, but just after nightfall and while the supper dishes were being cleared away, Zebedee Pauling knocked at the kitchen door. All

three of the Ball household looked upon the young fellow expectantly when he stepped in.

"I was just passing by and thought I'd look in and see how you all were," said Zeb, with his usual shy manner and apologetic smile.

"Come in and set down, Zeb," said the captain eagerly. "I cal'late you've got some news for us."

"I don't know," said Zeb thoughtfully, "but what you've got some news that might satisfy mom and me. That is, about that girl Tunis brought to the house."

"What about her, Zeb?" queried Prudence anxiously.

"Mom and I would be glad to know what you know about her," said Zebedee. "She—she 'pears to have a—a great imagination."

"I shouldn't wonder," Cap'n Ira snorted.

"She don't act crazy, but she certainly talks crazy," the visitor went on emphatically. "Why, she says the most ridiculous things about—about Miss Bostwick!" He bowed and blushed as he spoke the name and looked penitently toward Sheila. "Why, she declares *her* name is Bostwick!"

"That's what she done up here," said Cap'n Ira grimly. "I cal'late she means to kick up a fuss. Is she still stopping with your mother, Zeb?"

"Yes. She paid a week's board money down. I expect mom wouldn't have taken her, or it, if Tunis hadn't brought her."

"That wasn't Tunis' fault," snapped the old man. "He had to get shet of her somehow. We expect she'll try to make trouble."

"Oh, as for that," said Zeb, with some relief, "I don't see, even if she is your niece, why she should expect you to take her in if you don't want to!"

"She ain't," said Cap'n Ira flatly. "You can take that from me, Zeb."

"Not any relation at all?"

"None at all, as far as we know," declared the captain.

"Then what does she want to talk the way she does, for?" cried the young man. "I told mom she was crazy, and now I know she is."

"I guess likely," agreed the old man, taking upon himself the burden of the explanation. "None of us up here ever saw the gal before. Neither Prudence nor me nor Ida May. She's loony!"

"I told mom so," reiterated Zeb, with a great sigh of relief. "I know what she said must be a pack of foolishness. But you know how mom is. I——"

"She's soft. I know," returned Cap'n Ira.

"She's so tender-hearted," explained Zeb. "The girl talks so. She's talked mom not into believing in her, but into kind of listening and sympathizing with her. And now, to-night, she's took her to see Elder Minnett."

"What? I swan! To see the elder!" ejaculated

Cap'n Ira. "What she needs is a doctor, not a minister. What do you think of that, Prudence?"

"I hope Elder Minnett will be able to put her in better mind," sighed his wife. "That girl must have a very wicked heart, indeed, if she isn't really crazy."

CHAPTER XXVI

ELDER MINNETT HAS HIS SAY

ANOTHER night counted among the interminable nights which have dragged their slow length across the couch of sleeplessness. To Sheila, lying in the four-poster—a downy couch, indeed, for a quiet conscience—the space of time after she blew out her lamp and until the dawn passed like the sluggish coils of some Midgard serpent. An eternity in itself.

She came down to her daily tasks again with no change in her looks, although her voice had the same placid, kindly tone which had cheered the old people for these many weeks. But they both were worried about her.

"Maybe she's been working too hard, Prudence," ventured the old man. "Can it be so, d'ye think?"

"She says she likes to work. She's a marvel of a housekeeper, Ira. I don't mean to put too much on her, but I can't do much myself, spry as I do feel this fall. And she won't let me, anyway."

"I know, I know," muttered Cap'n Ira. "She's with you like she is with me. Always running to help me, or to pick up something I let fall, or to fetch and carry. A kinder girl never breathed. I swan! What should we do without her, Prue? That Tunis——"

"Sh!" Prudence begged him. "Don't chaff no more about that, Ira."

"Why not?" he asked. "Though I don't feel much like chaffing when I think of them getting married. 'Tis a pretty serious business for us, Prudence."

"I had a chance to hint about it last night when you went outside with Zebedee," whispered his wife, "I spoke about Tunis. She—she says she'll never leave us to marry Tunis or any other man."

"What's that?" ejaculated Cap'n Ira. "He wouldn't agree to come and live here, I reckon. What would become of his Aunt 'Cretia? I don't guess there's any fear of her getting married, is there?"

"No, no! Don't be funnin'! But Ida May said just that—in so many words."

"She's mad with him, do you cal'late? They had a tiff!" cried her husband. "And they were like two turtledoves the night that other gal come here. It don't seem possible. I swan! *That's* why she's so on her beam ends, I bet a cake!"

"It may be. She wouldn't say much. I didn't

understand, though, that they had quarreled. Only that she'd made up her mind that she wouldn't marry."

"Oh, she'll change her mind!" said Cap'n Ira, wagging his head.

"Do you think so? Not so easy. You'd ought to know by this time how firm Ida May can be."

"The Lord help Tunis then," said Cap'n Ira emphatically. "But his loss is our gain. Ain't no two ways about that."

Sheila's secret thoughts were not calculated to calm her soul. Her determination braced her body as well as her mind to go about her daily tasks with her usual thoroughness, but she could not confront the old people with even a ghost of her usual smile. So she kept out of their way as much as possible and communed alone with her bitter thoughts.

The uncertainty of what Ida May was doing and saying down there in Big Wreck Cove was not all that agitated Sheila. Her conscience, so long lulled by her peaceful existence here with the two old people, was now continually censuring her.

Sin brings its own secret punishment, though the sinner may hide the effects of the punishment for a long time. But Sheila could not now conceal the effect of the mental pain and the remorse she suffered.

Of one thing she might be sure. The neighbors had not as yet heard about the real Ida May or

heard her story. Otherwise some of the women living on the Head would have been in to hear the particulars from Prudence.

But that afternoon the throaty chug of Elder Minnett's little car—it had created almost a scandal in Big Wreck Cove when he bought it—was heard mounting the road to the Head.

"I swan!" commented Cap'n Ira, who sat at the sunny sitting-room window, for it was a cold day. "Here comes that tin wagon of the elder's. But he's alone. Get on your best bib and tucker, Prudence, for there ain't any doubt but what he's headin' in this way."

"Oh, dear me!" fluttered his wife. "I wonder what he's going to say. Make the tea strong, Ida May. The elder likes it so it'll about bear up an egg. And open a jar of that quince jam. I wish we had fresh biscuits, although them you made for dinner were light as feathers."

"I'll make some now. There's a hot oven," replied the girl.

"No, no," interposed Cap'n Ira firmly. "I want you should sit in here with us and hear all the elder's got to say."

"Perhaps, Uncle Ira, he will want to talk to you and Aunt Prue privately."

"There won't be no private talk about you, Ida May," snorted the captain, his keen eyes sparkling. "Not much! If he's got anything to say to your

aunt and me, he's got to say it in your hearing."

The elder was a tall and bony man with a stiff brush of gray beard and bushy hair to match, which seemed as uncompromising as his doctrinal discourses in the pulpit. He was an old-fashioned preacher, but not wholly an old-fashioned thinker.

Sheila had thought, on the few occasions when she had met him away from his pulpit, that there was an undercurrent of humanity in him quite equal to that in Cap'n Ira Ball, but his personal appearance and rather gruff manner made it difficult for one to be sure of the measure of his tenderness.

How Elder Minnett appeared in the sick room or in the house of sorrow, she did not know. She could not very well imagine his being tender at any time with the sinner at whom he thundered from the pulpit. Secretly she trembled at the old clergyman's approach.

"Well, Elder!" was the warm greeting of Prudence at the front door when the rattling automobile came to a wheezing halt before the gate. "Do tell! Ira said he see you coming up the road, and I was determined you shouldn't drive by without speaking. Do come in."

"I propose to, Sister Ball," was the grim-lipped reply.

He came into the house and took the proffered chair in the sitting room. They spoke of the weather, of the tide, and of the clam harvest. The

farm crops back of Big Wreck Cove did not interest Cap'n Ira.

"Well," said the elder finally, clearing his throat, "I've come up here on an errand you can possibly guess, Cap'n Ira and Sister Ball."

"Maybe we can and maybe we can't," observed the captain with a countenance quite as wooden as the elder himself displayed.

"I come on behalf of that young woman who was here to see you the other day."

"It's my opinion you'd done better to have gone to the insane asylum folks about her," rejoined Cap'n Ira.

"Now, Ira!" said Prudence softly.

"Seeing it as you do, Cap'n Ira," the elder remarked quite equably, "I conclude that you might think that. But you formed your judgment in the heat of—well, not anger, of course—but without sufficient reflection."

"Humph!" grunted Cap'n Ira noncommittally.

"I have talked with that young woman on two occasions," said the elder.

"With what young woman?" interrupted Cap'n Ira.

"With the girl staying at the Widow Pauling's. The girl who claims to be your niece.

"You'd better talk with the other young woman," said Cap'n Ira sternly. "Ida May! Just you come in here and sit down. You are as much interested

as we be, I guess. *This* is Ida May Bostwick, Elder Minnett," he added, as Sheila entered.

"Yes, yes. I have had the pleasure," said the elder, bowing gravely without offering to shake hands. He turned abruptly to Prudence. "You are quite convinced in your own mind, Sister Ball, that the young woman at the Pauling's is not your niece?"

"Why, Elder Minnett," returned Prudence, "how *can* she be? Ida May is Sarah Honey's only child, and Sarah was only distantly related to me. There never was another girl in the family—not like that one that came here the other day, for sure!" And the old woman shook her head emphatically.

"That girl you got down there at the port, Elder, is crazy—crazy as a loon," put in Cap'n Ira harshly.

"I am not so sure of that," the clergyman said shortly.

"I swan! Beg your pardon, Elder. No offense. But you don't mean to say that she seems sane and sensible to you?"

"Sane—yes! As for being sensible, that is another thing," confessed Elder Minnett.

"Huh! What do you mean by that?" asked Cap'n Ira curiously.

"She has told her story in full to me, and told it twice alike," said the grim-visaged minister, looking at Sheila as he answered the query. "An insane person is not so likely to do that, I believe. But

she is not what I would call a sensible young woman. Not at all."

"I should say not!" gasped Prudence.

"But I have heard her, and I have reflected on what she has said. I do not see, if she is an impostor, how she could have made up that story."

"Then she *must* be loony," muttered Cap'n Ira.

"I presume she told the same story to you that she did to me," pursued Elder Minnett. "I do not understand Tunis Latham's part in it, but the rest of her story seems quite reasonable."

"Reasonable?" repeated Prudence, with some warmth. "Do you call it reasonable to say what she did about Ida May?"

"In speaking of the young woman's reasonableness I mean in regard to the personal details she gave me. What she said in her anger to, or of, other people has no influence whatsoever on my judgment."

"Well, it has on mine!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira. "I'd have drove out a dozen gals that spoke as she did to Prudence and Ida May—crazy or not!"

"You would be wrong, Cap'n Ball," said the elder severely.

"Well, let's have the p'ints the girl makes!" growled the old shipmaster. "I will listen to 'em."

Elder Minnett bowed formally and began Ida May's story, checking off the several assertions she had made when she was at the Ball house far more

clearly than the girl herself had done. As Sheila listened, her heart sank even lower. It was so very reasonable! How could the Balls fail to be impressed?

But Cap'n Ira and Prudence listened with more of a puzzled expression in their countenances than anything else. It seemed altogether wild and improbable to them. Why! There sat Ida May before them. There could not be two Ida May Bostwicks!

"Say!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira suddenly, after Elder Minnett had concluded, "that girl says she worked at Hoskin & Marl's?"

"Yes."

"Why, ain't that where you worked, Ida May?"

"Yes," was Sheila's faint admission.

"You never see here there, did you?"

"I do not remember of having seen her until she came here," the girl said quite truthfully.

"Ought to be some way of proving up that," muttered Cap'n Ira.

"I have written to Hoskin & Marl, at the other young woman's instigation, and have asked about her," said Elder Minnett.

"Well, I never!" gasped Prudence, and her withered, old face grew pink.

"I hope you will not take offense," said the visitor evenly. "You must understand that the young woman has come to me in trouble, and it is my duty

to aid her if I can—in any proper way. That is my office. *Any* young woman"—he looked directly at Sheila again as he said it—"will find in me an adviser and a friend whenever she may need my help."

"We all know how good you are, Elder Minnett," Prudence hastened to say. "But that girl——"

"That girl," he interrupted, "is a human being needing help. I have advised her. Now I want to advise you."

"Out with it, Elder," said Cap'n Ira. "Good advice ain't to be sneezed at—not as I ever heard."

"I have the other young woman's promise that she will tell her story to nobody else—nobody at all—until I can hear from those whom she says are her employers. But with the understanding that you will do your part."

"What's that?" asked Cap'n Ira quickly.

"She wants to come up here and stay with you. She says she is sure you are her relatives. She says if you will let her come, she will be able to prove to you that she is the real niece you expected—whom you sent for last summer."

"Why, she's crazy!" again cried Cap'n Ira.

"I—I am almost afraid of her," murmured Prudence, looking from Sheila to her husband.

"I assure you, Sister Ball, she is not insane. She is harmless."

"She didn't talk as though she was when she was here—not by a jugful," declared Cap'n Ira bitterly.

"That was because she was angry," explained Elder Minnett patiently. "You must not judge her by her appearance when she came here the other day and found—as she declares—another girl in her rightful place."

"I swan!" exclaimed the old shipmaster, bursting out again. "I won't stand for that. Her rightful place, indeed! Why, if she was forty times Prudence's niece and we didn't want her here, what's to make us take her, I want to know?"

"Do you think we ought to, Elder?" questioned Prudence faintly.

"I think, under all the circumstances, that it is your Christian duty. Know the girl better. See if there is not something in her that reminds you——"

"Avast there!" shouted Cap'n Ira, pounding with his cane on the floor. "That's going a deal too far. 'Christian duty,' indeed! How about our duty to Ida May setting there, and to ourselves? Prudence is afraid of that crazy gal in the first place."

"I give you my word she is not insane."

"That's your opinion," said the captain grimly. "I wouldn't back it with my word, Elder, unless I was prepared to go the whole v'y'ge. Do you mean to say that you accept that gal's story as true—in all partic'lars?"

"I don't say that."

"Then I shall stick to my opinion. She's as loony as she can be. And I am plumb against insulting

our Ida May by letting the girl come up here. What do you say, Prudence?"

The old woman was much perturbed. Elder Minnett was a minister of the gospel. To be told by him that it was her Christian duty to take a certain course bore much weight with Prudence Ball.

But when she looked at Sheila, sitting there so pale and silent, and realized that on her head all this was falling, the old woman rose up, burst into tears, and threw herself into the girl's arms.

"No, no!" she sobbed. "Don't let her come here, Ira. We don't want her. We don't want anybody but Ida May whom we love so dear, and who we know loves us. We can't do it, Elder Minnett! Why, if they should come and tell me—and prove it —that Ida May wasn't our niece and that other girl was, I couldn't bear the creature 'round. No, I couldn't. I couldn't forgive anybody that would separate us from this dear, dear girl!"

Cap'n Ira had got upon his feet and was leaning forward on his cane. With a shaking finger he drew the elder's attention to the two women, rocking in each other's arms.

"You hear that? You see that?" demanded the captain brokenly, the tears starting from his own eyes and finding gutters down his cleanly shaved cheeks. "That's your answer, Elder! You have some idea how Prudence and I longed for young

company in this house, and somebody to help and comfort us. *And we got her.*

"Ida May come to us like the falling of manna in the wilderness for them spent and wandering Israelites. She has been to us more than ever we dared hope for. If she was our own child and had growed up here on Wreckers' Head our own born daughter, I couldn't think no more of her.

"And you come here and ask us to give countenance for a moment to a half-witted girl that says she belongs here in Ida May's place, and claiming Ida May's name. More than that, she saying that our own girl that we love so is a liar and an impostor and altogether bad—such as she must be if she had fooled us so. I swan! Elder, I should think you'd have more sense." And Cap'n Ira concluded abruptly and with a return to his usual self-control.

The silence which ensued was only broken by the old woman's sobs. Cap'n Ira, frankly wiping his own eyes with the great silk handkerchief which he usually flourished when he took snuff, strode across the room and patted Prudence's withered shoulder. He said nothing, nor did the elder. It was Sheila who broke the silence at last.

She had stood up. Now she put Prudence tenderly into Cap'n Ira's arms. She gave him, too, such a thankful, beaming glance that the old man

was almost staggered. For he had not seen one of those smiles for more than two days.

"Elder Minnett," Sheila said, and her voice was quite steady, "I think it is my place to speak."

"Yes?" was the noncommittal response of the grim old minister.

"I should not think for a moment of doubting your judgment in such a matter. If you say Cap'n Ira and Mrs. Ball should receive this—this girl here while the matter is being examined, I hope they will agree with you and allow her to come."

"Why, Ida May!" gasped Prudence.

"That gal's an angel! She ain't nothing but an angel!" marveled Cap'n Ira.

"But I think," said Sheila, "that the girl should be made to promise that while she is here, and if she comes here, that she will not speak to anybody outside this room at the present time of the claim she makes—especially as it seems to affect Captain Latham."

"I swan! That's so! He's got a wage and share in this thing, ain't he? And he ain't here to defend himself, if we be."

The elder nodded slowly. His gaze did not leave Sheila's face.

"I think I can promise that in her name. Indeed, I had already extracted such a promise before I would undertake to come up here. I have warned

Mrs. Pauling not to repeat a word the girl said to her. And Zebedee is a prudent young man."

"I told Zeb myself to keep his hatch battened," growled Cap'n Ira. "But, I swan, Ida May! I don't see how you can bear to have the crazy critter here. And Prudence——"

"If Ida May says she is willing," sighed the old woman, glad to be able to set a course not opposed to her minister's advice.

"Thank you, young woman," Elder Minnett said, speaking grimly enough to Sheila. "Those who have nothing to fear can afford to be generous. You have done right."

The subject was dropped—to the relief of all of them. Tea was poured from the marble-topped, black-walnut table, and Sheila passed biscuit, jam, cakes, and other delicacies. She performed her part of the ceremony with apparent calm. She did not speak to the elder again, nor he to her, save when she ran out to carry forgotten gloves to him when he had climbed into the automobile.

The grim old man shot her through with the keenest of keen glances as he accepted the gloves.

"I don't think, young woman," he said softly, "that you are likely to put poison in that other girl's tea—as she says she's afraid you will."

Then he drove away.

CHAPTER XXVII

CAP'N IRA SPEAKS OUT

WRUNG as Sheila's heart had been by the expression of the old woman's utter confidence in her and by Cap'n Ira's warm words of approbation spoken before the elder, it was nevertheless for Tunis Latham's sake that she had abetted the minister's desire and had agreed that the real Ida May Bostwick should come to the Ball house on Wreckers' Head.

By extracting a promise from Ida May that she would talk to nobody for the present—especially about the connection of the captain of the *Seamew* with Ida May's affairs—Sheila believed she had entered a wedge which might open the way for the young man to escape from a situation which threatened both his reputation and his peace of mind.

To save Tunis! She was fairly obsessed by that thought. Her vow before the picture of Tunis' mother in the *Seamew's* cabin must be in Sheila's

view to the very end. She had a sufficient share of that vision of the Celt to be deeply impressed by a promise made as that had been made—though in secret. It was a sacred pledge.

It was no easy matter for any of the Ball household to consider the coming of Ida May with serenity. Prudence, at heart, shrank from the claimant on her hospitality almost as much as Sheila did. If Cap'n Ira hid his perturbation better than the others, he nevertheless hobbled about with a very solemn countenance.

"I swan!" he muttered within Sheila's hearing. "It's most like there was a corpse in the house. This ain't no way to live. I do wish Elder Minnett could have minded his own business and let well enough alone. Let the girl talk, and other folks, too. Trying to stop gossip is like trying to put your finger on a drop of quicksilver. There won't be no good come o' that girl being here. That's as sure as sure."

The elder's car came wheezing up the hill again about the middle of the forenoon. He did not alight himself, but Ida May needed the presence of nobody to lend her assurance. She hopped out of the car with her bag and flaunted her cheap finery through the gate and in at the front door.

Her reception at this end of the house marked the unmistakable fact that Prudence and Cap'n Ira

received her as a stranger rather than in a confidential way.

"Well, Aunt Prue! For you are my aunt whatever you may say," was Ida May's prologue. "And you are my uncle," she added, her greenish-brown eyes flashing a glance at the grimly observant captain. "I must say it's pretty shabby treatment I've got from you so far. But I don't blame you—not at all. I blame that girl and Tunis Latham."

"Avast there!" put in Cap'n Ira so sternly and with so threatening a tone of voice and visage that even Ida May was silenced. "We've let you come here, my girl, because Elder Minnett asked us to; and not at all because our opinion of you is changed. Far from it. You're here on sufferance and you'd best be civil spoken while you remain. Ain't that the ticket, Prudence?"

His wife nodded, in full accord with his statement of the situation, although she could not bear to look so sternly on any person as Cap'n Ira now looked at Ida May.

"Well! I like that!" sniffed the girl, tossing her head, but she actually shrank from the captain.

"Furthermore, as regards Tunis Latham, you was to say nothing about him outside of this house if you was let come here. And I warn you, we don't care to hear nothing in his disfavor *in* this house."

"Oh! I can see he's a favorite with you," muttered Ida May.

"Then trim your sails according," admonished the old man. "In addition, you mentioned the young woman we already got here in a way we don't like none too well. I want to impress on your mind that it was only through her saying she was agreeable to your coming here that we agreed to the elder's request and let you come."

"She did, eh?" cried Ida May, flouncing in her chair. "Well, I don't thank her."

"No. I cal'late you ain't of a thanking disposition," said Cap'n Ira. "But you like enough won't drop your bread butter-side down. That's all."

Ida May, startled by his speech, stared with less impudence at the old man. For his part, the captain watched her pretty closely, and he had met and judged too many people in his day not to form gradually, as the hours passed, a decided opinion regarding Ida May.

Nor did he cling to his first impression—the one made in haste and some vexation, when she had first tried to thrust herself into the Ball household and demanded the place filled by Sheila Macklin. This girl certainly was not insane. But with all her apparent smartness, Cap'n Ira easily saw that she was not intelligent—that she had scarcely ordinary understanding. Beside the newcomer's shallow nature and even more shallow endowments, Sheila seemed to be from a different world.

"I swan!" whispered Cap'n Ira to Prudence some

time later. "The difference between them two girls! They ain't to be spoke of in the same county, I declare. Look at that one, Prudence," he said, with a side glance at the newcomer. "Ain't she a sight with them thin and flashy clothes?"

"I can't see anything about her that looks like any of the Honeys, let alone Sarah."

"Huh! No. Only that her hair's sorter red," returned Cap'n Ira, "like Sarah's was."

The visitor proved her position in the household by sitting idly in a rocking-chair looking over some pictures which were on the table or staring out of the window. She offered to do nothing for Prudence. But, of course, Ida May was not very domestic. Living in a furnished room and working behind the counter in a department store does not develop the domestic virtues to any appreciable degree.

She did not see Sheila until dinner was on the table and she was called to the meal with Cap'n Ira and the old woman. The stiff, little bow with which Ida May favored the girl in possession was returned by the latter quite as formally.

Sheila had regained complete control of voice and face now. Although she did not actually address Ida May, her manner was such that there was no restraint put upon the company. It was the newcomer's manner, if anything, that curtailed the usual friendly intercourse at the Ball table.

Ida May possessed some powers of observation. She would have said herself that she was able to "put two and two together." The way the meal had been cooked, the way it was served, and the work entailed in doing both these things, were matters not overlooked by the visitor.

She knew that Prudence had given neither thought nor attention to getting the dinner. The girl the Balls had received in Ida May's name and supposed identity had done it all herself. It seemed to be expected of her!

She saw, before the day was over, that Sheila was a very busy person indeed. That she not only did the housework, but that she waited upon Prudence and Cap'n Ira "hand and foot." She did it with such unconcern that the new girl could be sure these tasks were quite what was expected of her.

"Why," exclaimed Ida May to herself, "she's just hired help! Is *that* what they wanted me for when they sent Tunis Latham up to Boston after me? I'd like to see myself!"

She had foreseen something of this kind when she had refused so unconditionally to come down here to the Cape. And her observation of the house and its furnishings, as well as the appearance of the old couple, had confirmed her suspicion that her belief in the Balls "being pretty well fixed" was groundless.

After her interview with Elder Minnett, although

she had refrained from detailing her story and her spiteful comments about Sheila and Tunis Latham to the Paulings, she had not ceased to question Zebedee and his mother about the financial condition of the Balls.

She had learned that a couple of thousand dollars would probably buy all the real property the old people owned on Wreckers' Head. There was a certain invested sum which secured them a fair living. Beyond that, the Big Wreck Cove people knew of no wealth belonging to either Cap'n Ira or Prudence.

Ida May already considered that she had come down here to the Cape on a fool's errand. She would like to make herself solid, however, with the old folks so as to benefit when they were dead and gone, if that were possible. But to make herself a kitchen drudge for them? She would like to see herself!

There was a phase of the situation which held Ida May to the course she had set sail upon, and one which would hold her to it to the bitter end. Her spitefulness and determination to be revenged upon this unknown girl who had usurped the place originally offered her by the Balls, and who had stolen her name as well, was quite sufficient to cause a person of Ida May Bostwick's character to fight for her rights.

She would be revenged on Tunis, too. Or, at

least, she would make him, as well as the other girl, suffer for the slight he had put upon her.

Had she not preened her feathers and strutted her very best on the occasion when he interviewed her at Hoskin & Marl's and taken her out to lunch? And to no end at all! He had been quite unimpressed by Ida May's airs and graces.

Yet he would take up with this other girl—a mere nobody. Worse than a nobody, of course. She must be both a bad and a cunning woman to have done what it was plain she had done. She had wound Tunis Latham around her finger, and had hoodwinked the old people in the bargain!

Ida May saw the other girl waiting on Prudence and Cap'n Ira; she observed her tenderness toward them and their delight in her ministrations; and these things which she regarded with her green-glinting eyes made her taste the bitterness of wormwood. She hated Sheila more and more as the day wore on; and she scorned the old people both for what she considered this niggardliness and for their simplicity, as well, in being fooled by this other girl.

For, of course, to Ida May's mind, Sheila's kindness and the love shown for the Balls on her part was all put on. It could not be otherwise. Ida May Bostwick could not, in the first place, imagine any sane girl "falling for the two old hicks."

Prudence could seldom show herself other than kindly toward any person whether she exactly ap-

proved of that person or not. So she chatted cheerfully at Ida May, if not with her. She was quite as insistent as Cap'n Ira, however, in keeping away from the vexing question of the identity of the two girls.

Right at the first the question had been raised: where should the visitor be put to sleep? Ida May was prepared to object strenuously if any slight was put upon her, such as being given some little, tucked-up attic room away from the rest of the family. Had she dared, she would have demanded the use of the room the false Ida May occupied; only she was not sure, after seeing the position Sheila seemed to hold in the household, that she cared to be put to sleep in the room of the "hired help."

But Sheila herself settled that question.

"The guest room is ready, Aunt Prue," she said to Prudence. "I cleaned it this week and the little stove is set up in there if it should grow cold overnight. All the bed needs is aired sheets. I'll get them out of the press."

So Prudence took Ida May to the guest chamber, which was beyond the parlor. A black-walnut set, which had been the height of magnificence when Cap'n Ira and Prudence were married, filled the shade-drawn room with shadows. There was an ingrain carpet on the floor of a green groundwork with pale-yellow flowers on it, of a genus known to no botanist. The tidies on the chair backs were

so stiff with starch that it would be a punishment to lay one's head against them.

On a little marble-topped table between the windows was something made of shells and seaweed in a glass-topped case. It looked to Ida May like a dead baby in a coffin.

"Of all the junk!" she muttered to herself when Prudence left her to arrange the contents of her bag as she chose. "And that girl likes it here! Well, I'll show her who's who and what's what!

"I'd like to know where I ever saw her face before? I bet it was somewhere she'd no business to be—just as she has sneaked in here where she doesn't belong. The nasty, hateful thing!

"If Bessie Dole or Mayme Leary could only see this dump!" she added, looking over the room again. "Anyhow, I've made 'em give me the best they've got. I'll show 'em how to treat a *real* relation that comes to see 'em."

Supper time came and passed no more cheerfully than had the midday meal. The society of the old people was anything but enlivening for Ida May. In desperation she began to talk, and out of sheer perverseness she lighted upon the subject of the establishment of Hoskin & Marl.

Now Prudence found this topic of interest, for since Annabel Coffin—she who was a Buttle—had dilated upon those great marts of trade in Boston, the old woman had been vastly curious. Sheila had

never cared to talk of her experiences as saleswoman behind the counter.

"They tell me they sell most everything you could name in those stores," Prudence said reflectively. "Heaps of dry goods, I suppose. Let me see, what did you sell, my dear?"

"I'm in the laces," said Ida May. "But Hoskin & Marl sell lots besides dry goods."

"Oh, yes! Annabel did say something about automobiles and—and plasters; didn't she, Ira?"

"Goodness knows," rejoined her husband with a groan. "Annabel Coffin said so much the last time she was here that my head buzzes now when I think of her."

"Now, you hesh!" said Prudence. "Never can interest a man in such things. So you sold laces, did you, my dear? Oh, Ida May!" she exclaimed suddenly to Sheila, sitting on the other side of the table. "Ida May, what did you say you sold in that store? You worked for Hoskin & Marl, didn't you?"

"Ye-es. I—I was in the silverware and jewelry department," stammered Sheila, the question coming so unexpectedly that she could not exercise consideration before making answer.

"Now, is that so?" cried Prudence. "That must have been nice. To handle all them pretty things. But lace is pretty, too," she added, turning quickly to the guest again. "I expect you find it so."

The old woman was startled into silence by the expression she saw upon Ida May's face. The latter was glaring across the table at Sheila. No other word could so express the intense and malevolent look in those greenish-brown eyes and on that sharp countenance.

Sheila's gaze was enthralled as well by Ida May's sudden emotion. She half rose from her chair. But her strength left her limbs again, and she fell back into the seat.

"What's the matter, Ida May?" demanded Cap'n Ira, in wonder and alarm.

The real Ida May sprang up with a shriek. She shook her hand at Sheila and for a moment could not articulate. Then she said:

"I know her now! I knew I'd seen that creature before and I thought I'd remember what and who she is. And she dares come down here and sneak her way into honest people's houses! The gall of her!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

GONE

"Looker here, girl!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira sternly. Putting his hand upon Ida May's shoulder, he forced her down into her chair again. His own eyes gleamed angrily, and his countenance expressed his wrath. "What was you told on coming here? Didn't you promise to keep a taut line on all that foolishness? I won't stand for it. No, Prudence!" he exclaimed, as his wife tried to interfere. "I won't stand for it. She must either keep away from that business, or I'll put her right out of the house. Leastways, it being night, I'll send her to her room."

"Do you think you can boss me like that?" cried Ida May hotly, so angry herself that she forgot her fear of him. "I'm not your slave, nor your hired help, like that creature." She pointed scornfully at Sheila. "And you'll just listen to something I've got to say. If you don't, I'll go out to-morrow and tell everybody in this hick town. I'll hire a hall to tell 'em in!"

"Won't—won't you be good, deary?" begged Prudence, before her husband could make any rejoinder to this defiance. "You know you promised Elder Minnett you would be if we let you come here."

"I don't want to stay here. I've seen enough of this place and you all! And I would be ashamed to stay any longer than I can help with folks that take in such a girl as she is."

Again Ida May's little claw indicated Sheila, who stared, speechless, helpless, at least for the time being. The harassed girl could fight for herself no longer. She knew that she was on the verge of betrayal. She could not stem the tide of Ida May's venom. The latter must make the revelation which had threatened ever since she had come to Wreckers' Head. There was no way of longer smothering the truth. It would come out!

"Look here," Cap'n Ira said, his curiosity finally aroused, "the elder says you ain't crazy! But it looks to me——"

"I'm not crazy, I can tell you," snapped Ida May, taking him up short. "But I guess you and Aunt Prue must be. Why, you don't even know the name of this girl you took in instead of me —in my rightful place. But I can tell you who she is—and what she's done. I remember her now. I knew I'd seen her before—the hussy!"

"Belay that!" exclaimed Cap'n Ira.

But he said it faintly. He was looking at the other girl now, and something in her expression and in her attitude made him lose confidence. His voice died in his throat. Ida May Bostwick had the upper hand at last—and she kept it.

"Look at her," she exulted, the green lights in her brown eyes glinting like the sparkling eyes of a serpent. "Look at her. She knows that I know. She's come down here and fooled you all, but she can't fool you any longer. And that Tunis Latham! Why, it can't be possible he knew what she was from the first!"

"See here," said Cap'n Ira shakily. "What do you mean? What are you getting at—or trying to? If you got anything to say about Ida May, get it out and be over with it."

"Oh, Ira! Don't! Stop her!" wailed Prudence.

Like the old man, Prudence finally realized that there was something wrong—something very wrong, indeed—with the girl they had known for months as Ida May and whom they had learned to love so dearly.

Nobody looking at Sheila could doubt this for a moment. Her tortured expression of countenance, the wild light in her eyes, her trembling lips, advertised to the beholders that the last bastion of her fortress was taken, that the wall was breached and into that breach now marched the triumphant phrases of the real Ida May's bitter, gloating speech.

"Look at her!" repeated the latter. "She can't deny it now. She knows I know her and what she is. Why, Aunt Prue—and you, Captain Ball—have been fooled nice, I must say. And that Tunis Latham! Well, he can't be much!"

"Don't—don't say anything against Tunis!"

It was not a voice at all like the usual mellow tones of Sheila Macklin which uttered those faint words. Hoarse, strained, uncertain, there was yet a note of command in the phrase which had its influence on the wildly excited Ida May.

"I'll say what I've got to say about *you,* miss!" she exclaimed with exultation. "And you—nor they—shan't stop me. You're the girl that was arrested in the store for stealing. It must have been two—why, it must have been more than three years ago. I hadn't worked there but a little while. No wonder I didn't remember you at first."

Cap'n Ira vented a groan and caught at his wife's hand. She was sobbing frantically. She still murmured her plea for the captain to stop the awful revelation Ida May was bent on making. But the latter gave no heed and the captain himself was speechless.

"And I can't remember her name even now," went on Ida May, flashing a look at the Balls. Their pitiful appearance made no impression upon her. "But that don't matter. I guess they've got your record at Hoskin & Marl's. You worked there all

right; sure you worked there, in the jewelry section. You stole something. I saw the store detective, Miss Hopwell, take you up to the manager's office. I never heard what they did to you, but they did a plenty, I bet."

She turned confidently again to the horrified captain and his wife.

"Just see how she looks. She don't deny it. How she managed to work that Tunis Latham into bringing her down here, I don't know. She pulled the wool over his eyes all right.

"Why, she's a thief! She was arrested! I guess you can see now that I'm not crazy—far from it. She won't dare say again that she is Ida May Bostwick. I—guess—not!"

The malevolent exultation of the girl was fearful to behold. But neither Cap'n Ira nor Prudence now looked at Ida May. Leaning against her husband, the tears coursing over her withered cheeks, Prudence joined Cap'n Ira in gazing at the other girl.

She rose slowly to her feet. Something like strength came back to her; even into her voice, as Sheila again spoke. Nor did she look at Ida May, but fixed her feverish gaze upon the two old people.

"What—what she says is true—as far as I am concerned. But—but Tunis did not know. It is not his fault. I was desperate. I heard what he said to—to Miss Bostwick. I chanced to overhear it. I was desperate; I hated the city. I was willing to

take a chance for the sake of getting among people who would be kind to me—who were good."

"Bah!" exclaimed Ida May raucously. "You're not fit to go among good people!"

Sheila did not heed her. She spoke slowly—haltingly, but what she said held the old people silent.

"Tunis is not to blame. I told him this—this girl"—she pointed to Ida May, but did not look at her—"was not the right Miss Bostwick. I said that I was the girl he wanted to see. I made him think so. I tricked him. Don't listen to her!" she added wildly, as the enraged Ida May would have interposed. "Tunis thought she had talked to him just for a joke. I made him believe that. I—I would have done anything then to get away from the city and to come down here. Perhaps he was at fault because he did not take more time to find out about me—to be sure I was the right girl. But he cannot be blamed for anything else. I tell you, it was all my fault."

"I don't believe it!" snapped Ida May.

But Cap'n Ira put her aside with his hand, and there was returned firmness in his voice.

"Is this the truth? Are you what she says you are?" he asked.

"Oh, don't, Ira!" gasped his sobbing wife. "She——"

"We've got to learn the straight of it," said the

old man sternly. "If we've been bamboozled, we've got to know it. Now's the time for her to speak."

Sheila was still gazing at him. She nodded, indicating that his question was already answered.

"You—you mean to say you stole—like she says?"

"I was arrested in Hoskin & Marl's. They accused me of stealing. Yes."

She said no more. She turned, when he did not speak again, and walked slowly to the stairway door. She opened it and went up, closing the door behind her.

It was Ida May who moved first when she was gone. She jumped up once more and started for the stairway.

"I'll tell her what's what!" she ejaculated. "The gall of her to come here and say she was me and get my rightful place! I'll put her out with my own hands!"

Somehow—it would be hard to say just how—Cap'n Ira was before her, ere she could arrive at the stairway door.

"Avast!" he said throatily. "Don't take too much upon yourself, young woman. You don't quite own these premises—yet."

"You ain't going to stand for her stayin' here any longer, are you?" demanded the amazed Ida May.

"Whether or not she stays here is more my busi-

ness and Prudence's business than it is yours," said the old man. "But there's one thing sure, and you may as well l'arn it first as last: you're not to speak to her nor do anything else to annoy her. Understand?"

"You—you——"

"Heed what I tell ye!" said Cap'n Ira, grim-lipped and with flashing eyes. "You interfere with that girl in any way and it won't be her I'll put out o' the house. I'll put you out—night though it is—and you'll march yourself down to the port and to the Widder Pauling's alone. Understand me?"

There was silence again in the kitchen, save for Prudence's pitiful sobbing.

In Tunis Latham's mind as he came up from the port four days later was visioned no part of the tragedy which had occurred at the Ball homestead during his absence on this last voyage to Boston. He had suffered trouble enough during the trip even to dull the smart of Sheila's renunciation of him before he had left the Head. Indeed, he could scarcely realize even now that she had meant what she said—that she could mean it!

So brief had been their dream of love—only since that recent Sunday when they walked the beaches about the foot of Wreckers' Head—that it seemed to the captain of the *Seamew* it could not be

so soon over. If Sheila really and truly loved him, how could anything part them?

When he considered her wild manner and her trenchant words when last he had seen her, however, his heart sank. He had gained during the few months of their acquaintance a pretty accurate idea of how firm she could be—how unwavering in face of any difficulty. He realized that her obstinacy, when her mind was once settled on a course of action, was not easily overcome. She had declared that they could not be lovers any longer; that the situation which had arisen through the appearance of the real Ida May upon Wreckers' Head had made her decision necessary; and she had refused to consider any other outcome of this dreadful affair.

In his business there was much which would have disturbed Tunis in any event. The negro cook had deserted the *Seamew* the moment after she touched the Boston wharf. Although the other hands had remained by the schooner until she had just now dropped anchor in the cove below, he was not at all sure that they would sail with him for another voyage.

Why these new men should be more troubled by the silly tattle of the hoodoo than even the Portygees had been was a problem Tunis could not solve. And seamen were so scarce just then in Boston that he had been obliged to risk another voyage without engaging strangers to man the *Seamew*. Besides,

being a true Cape Codder, he disliked hiring other than Cape men to work the schooner.

For one thing he could be grateful. Orion Latham had taken his chest ashore this very day. And Zebedee Pauling had offered himself in Orion's place on the wharf as Tunis had just now come ashore.

He had been glad to take on Zeb in place of his cousin. And from young Pauling he had learned at least one piece of news connected with affairs on Wreckers' Head. Zeb told him that the girl he had brought to the Pauling house had talked with Elder Minnett and that the elder had later taken her up to the Ball house, where she had remained.

There was not much gossip about the matter it seemed. Nobody seemed to know who the young woman was; nor did Zeb know what was going on at the Ball homestead. It was with this slight information only that Tunis now approached the old place. He saw Cap'n Ira hobbling into the barn, but he saw nobody else about.

The day was gray, and a chill wind crept over the brown earth, rustling the dead stalks of the weeds and curling little spirals of dust in the road which rose no more than a foot or two, then fell again, despairingly. In any event the young shipmaster must have felt the oppression of the day and the lingering season. His spirits fell lower, and he came to the Ball place with such a feeling of

depression that he hesitated about turning in at the gate at all.

As Cap'n Ira did not at once come out of the barn, the younger man made his way there instead of going first to the kitchen door. He shrank from meeting the real Ida May again. At any rate, he wanted first to get the lay of the land from the old man.

He looked into the dim interior of the place and for a moment did not see Cap'n Ira at all. The ghostly face of the Queen of Sheba appeared at the opening over her manger. Tunis was about to call when he saw the old man straining upon the lower rungs of the ladder to reach the loft to pitch down a bunch of fodder. Queenie whinnied softly.

"Hello, Cap'n Ira!" Tunis hailed. "What are you doing that for?" He hastened to cross the barn floor to his aid. "Where's Ida May that she lets you do this?"

"Ida May?" The old man repeated the name with such disgust that Tunis was all but stunned and stopped to eye Cap'n Ira amazedly. "D'ye think she'd take a step to save me a dozen? Or lift them lily-white hands of hers to keep Prudence from doing all the work she has to do? I swan!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Tunis. "You sound mighty funny, Cap'n Ira. Hasn't Ida May been doing all and sundry for you for months? Is she sick?"

"I—I don't mean *that* gal," quavered Cap'n Ira. "I mean the real Ida May."

He half tumbled off the ladder into Tunis Latham's arms. He clung to the young man tightly, and, although it was dark in the barn, Tunis could have sworn that there were tears on the old man's cheeks.

"Don't you know we've got the right Ida May with us at last—Prudence's niece that has come here to visit for a while and play lady? Yes, you was fooled; we was bamboozled. That—that other gal, Tunis, is a real bad one, I ain't no doubt. She pulled the wool over your eyes and made a monkey of most everybody, it seems. She——"

"Who are you talking about?" cried Tunis, in his alarm almost shaking the old man.

"I'm telling you the girl you brought down here, thinking she was Ida May Bostwick, turned out to be somebody else. I don't know who. Anyway, she ain't no relation of Prudence or me. I ain't blaming you none, boy; she told us we musn't blame you, for you didn't know the truth about her, either."

"Cap'n Ira, where is she?" demanded the younger man hoarsely.

"She ain't here. She's gone. She left four nights ago—after Ida May had remembered what she'd done in that big store in Boston. Oh, she admitted it——"

"You mean to tell me she's gone? That you don't know where she is?" almost shouted Tunis.

"Easy, boy! Remember I got some feeling yet in them arms you was squeezing. It ain't our fault she went. She left us in the night—stole out with just a bundle of clothes and things. Left, Prudence says, every enduring thing she'd got since she come here—that we give her."

Tunis groaned.

"Yes, she's gone. And she's left that other dratted girl in her place. I swan, Tunis, I'd just as leave have the figgerhead of the old *Susan Gatskill* sittin' by our kitchen stove as to have that useless critter about. She ain't no good to Prudence and me—not at all!"

CHAPTER XXIX

ON THE TRAIL

THERE was but a single idea in Sheila Macklin's mind when she left those three people in the kitchen and mounted to her room. Indeed, there was scarcely left to the sadly distracted girl another sane thought.

She must leave the house before she could be further questioned. She hoped that she had said enough to exonerate Tunis. If she said more, it might be to raise some doubt in the minds of Cap'n Ira and Prudence as to Tunis' ignorance of her true reputation. She must escape any cross-examination—on that or any other topic.

She believed that the captain of the *Seamew* possessed sufficient caution to keep secret the particulars of their first meeting until he had heard from the old people the few false details she had left in their minds. She had done all she could to make Tunis' reputation secure in the eyes of those who

must know any particulars of his connection with her. She had kept her vow to the dead woman whom the young shipmaster had, throughout his life, so revered—his mother.

She did not light her bedroom lamp until she knew by the sounds from below that the family had retired for the night. Then, stepping softly, she went over her small possessions and made a bundle of those which she had brought with her when she came from Boston. The articles of apparel purchased with money given her by the Balls she left in the closet or in the bureau drawers.

This done, she did not lie down on the bed, but sat by the north window staring out into the starlit dark. There was no lamp to watch in the window of Latham's Folly to-night. Tunis was far away. Had she been prepared for this unexpected catastrophe, she would have been far, far away from Wreckers' Head before Tunis returned.

As it chanced, she possessed very little money—scarcely more than enough to take her to Paulmouth. There she would be no better off than she was at Big Wreck Cove. Sheila was not, in truth, quite accountable for her actions at this time. To get away from the Ball house was her only really clear thought. What followed must fall as fate directed.

At the first faint gleam of dawn in the sky, and as the distant stars paled and disappeared, the girl

crept down the stairs with her bundle, her shoes in her hand, and went out by the kitchen door. She heard only the deep breathing of the old captain from across the sitting room and now and then the sobbing breath of Prudence, like the breathing of a hurt child that has fallen asleep in pain and half wakes to a realization of it.

As she turned to close the outer door softly behind her, the girl's heart throbbed in response to the old woman's sorrow. While she sat on the bench to lace her shoes the cat, old Tabby, came rubbing and purring about her skirts. Muffled, as though from a great distance, a rooster vented a questioning crow as though he doubted that it was yet time to announce the birth of another day.

She went to the barn to feed Queenie for the last time. That outraged old creature displayed her surprised countenance at the opening above her manger and blew sonorously through her nostrils. Perhaps the gray mare remembered how she had been aroused at a similar hour once before, and by Cap'n Ira himself. That experience must have been keen in the Queen of Sheba's memory if she had any memory at all.

But the troubled girl gave the mare less attention than usual, throwing down some fodder and pouring a measure of corn into the manger. The mare turned to that with appetite. Corn came not amiss to Queenie, no matter at what hour it was vouch-

safed her. Her sound old teeth did not stop crunching the kernels as Sheila went out of the barn.

From the shed she secured an ax and a spade, as well as a basket. In spite of her condition of mind she knew exactly what she wanted to do—and she did it. Had she thought out her intention for months she could have gone about the matter no more directly and practically. Yet, had one stopped Sheila and asked her what she was about—exactly what her intentions were—the query would have found her unprepared with an answer.

Both her physical and mental condition precluded Sheila from going far from the Ball homestead. What she had been through during these past few days had drained out of her physical vigor as well as all intellectual freshness.

When Cap'n Ira Ball had led the feebly protesting Queen of Sheba across these empty fields to her intended sacrifice, the two had made no more dreary picture against the dim dawn than did Sheila now. She carried the bundle she had made slung over one shoulder by a length of rope. The spade, ax, and basket balanced her figure on the other side; she bent forward as she walked and, from a distance, Prudence herself would have looked no older or more decrepit than did the girl now leaving the Ball premises.

She did not follow the same course that the cap-

tain and Queenie had followed on that memorable occasion, but took a path that led to a cart track to the beach behind John-Ed Williams' house. Nobody was astir anywhere on Wreckers' Head but herself.

In an hour she arrived at the objective point toward which she had been headed from the first. Why and how she had thought of this refuge it would be hard to tell. Least of all could Sheila have explained her reason for coming here. It was in her mind, it was away from all other human habitations, and she did not think anybody would have the right to drive her from it.

The cabin formerly occupied by Hosea Westcott was well above the tide, was, or could be made, perfectly dry, was roughly, if not comfortably furnished, and offered the girl a shelter in which she thought she would be safe.

To one who had spent such weary months in a narrow room in a Hanover Street lodging house, going in and out with speech with scarcely any one save the person to whom she paid her weekly dole of rent, there could be no loneliness in a place like this, where the surf soughed continually in one's ear, a hundred feathered forms flashed by in an hour, sails dotted the dimpling sea, and the strand itself was spread thick with many varieties of nature's wonders.

During the summer and early fall, Sheila had be-

come a splendid oarswoman. In a skiff belonging to little John-Ed which was drawn up on the sands not far from the cabin she had paddled out through the narrow neck of the tiny cove's entrance and pulled bravely through the surf and out upon the sea beyond. She had learned more than a bit of sea lore, too, from Cap'n Ira and Tunis. And regarding the edible shellfish to be found along the beaches, she was well informed.

If an old man such as Hosea Westcott, feeble and spent, no doubt, could pick up a living here, why could not she? Sheila did not fear starvation. Indeed, she did not even look forward to such a possibility. She did not fear work of any kind. With every salt breath she drew, strength, like the tide itself, flowed into her body. Although her mind remained in a partially stunned condition, her muscles soon recovered their vigor.

Of course the girl's presence here in the abandoned cabin, her taking up a hermit life on the shore, could not remain unknown to the neighbors on Wreckers' Head for long. Yet at this season of the year the men were all busy elsewhere and the women almost never came down to the beaches. It is a remarkable fact that most longshore women have little interest in the beauties or wonders to be found along the beaches, even in the sea itself. Perhaps this is because the latter is such a hard mistress to their menfolk.

Nevertheless, Sheila could not hide herself away from everybody—not even on that first day. The Balls made no outcry when they found that she had disappeared. And no near-port fishing craft came by. But the smoke from the chimney of the cabin, when she had swept and made comfortable its interior and built a fire of driftwood in the rusty pot stove, attracted at least one sharp eye.

Down the bank, along with a small avalanche of sand and gravel, plunged little John-Ed and his freckled face appeared at the doorway.

"By the great jib boom!" he cried. "What you doing here? Playing castaway?"

"Yes, John-Ed," said Sheila. "That is it exactly. I am a castaway."

He stared at her. She could not take this boy into her confidence. But already little John-Ed was a henchman of hers, in spite of the fact that Sheila often had made him work.

"I am going to stay here for a while," she told him. "But I would rather nobody but you knew about it."

"By the great jib boom!" exploded the boy for a second time. "Not even Cap'n Ira and Aunt Prudence?"

"Not even them," sighed the girl.

"I bet it's because you don't want to stay there while that other girl is visitin' them. Ain't that it? She's a snippy thing!"

"You must not say so to anybody," urged Sheila. "It will not be wrong for you to say nothing about my being here to your father and mother. Do you understand?"

"I can keep a secret, all right," he assured her proudly.

"I believe you can. And do you think you could get off to go down to the store for me this evening?"

"Going down anyway for mom," he assured her.

Sheila had a dollar and a little change besides. She had already planned just what the dollar would buy in the way of necessaries. There were cooking utensils in the cabin sufficient for her modest needs. She gave little John-Ed the dollar and her list and warned him to hide her purchases safely until the next morning and bring them to her on his way to school.

"What you going to eat to-night?" he asked her bluntly.

"I dug some clams at low water and caught a big horseshoe crab."

"Cousin Phineas brought us more squeteague than we can eat. Mom told me to cut one up for the hens. I'll bring it down to you in a little. It's a fresh one."

In spite of her refusal, he did this, and brought along, too, a box of sweet crackers which he had bought and hidden away in his bedroom closet in preparation for some time when he might wake up

in the night and feel that he was on the verge of famine.

"Though I never did wake up in the night that I can remember, 'cept that time I had the tooth-ache," he observed.

And in this way Sheila began her hermit life in the fisherman's cabin.

But Sheila was not without a practical design as to her future. In her determination to accept no further aid from the Balls she had crippled her finances. Back in the inland town where she had spent her girlhood, and where Dr. Macklin had served the community so long, there were those who, in disapproving Sheila's venture into the city, at least had a sense of justice. Some of these critical friends whom the young woman had shrunk from appealing to heretofore, still owed for Dr. Macklin's services; and Sheila felt that in this present tragic emergency she must attempt the collection of these old debts.

She wrote letters praying that money might be sent her by express to Paulmouth, but with the orders addressed under cover to "John-Ed Williams, Jr." at the Big Wreck Cove post office. She explained her design to her juvenile confidant and little John-Ed was made immensely proud of such mark of her trust. She could have found no more faithful adherent than the boy, and with him the

secret of her dwelling on the lonely shore and in her hermit-like state was safe.

But her presence there could not be hidden for long; of that she was well aware. Little John-Ed, however, told nobody of her whereabouts until the day Tunis Latham came back from Boston and learned that the girl he loved had stolen away from her home in the Ball house.

Coming out of the rear door of the barn, fresh from the interview with the old captain which had so shocked him, Tunis saw a small boy astride the low stone fence that marked the rear boundary of the Ball farm. The captain of the *Seamew* was in no mood to bandy words with little John-Ed Williams, but the sharp tooth of his troubled thought fastened upon one indubitable fact: if there is anything odd going on in a community, the small boy of that community knows all about it—or, at least, as much about it as it is possible to know.

Tunis could not have walked up to any adult person on Wreckers' Head and asked the question which he put to little John-Ed on the spur of the moment:

"Where is she?"

He did not have to utter Sheila's name. Indeed, he was doubtful by what name it would be wise to call her. But he did not have to be plainer with little John-Ed. He saw in the sly expression of the

boy's eyes that he knew whom he meant. But he shook his head.

"You know where she went," was the schooner captain's accusation. "Where is she?"

"I—I can't tell you," stammered the boy. "I promised not."

A promise is a promise, especially to a small boy who scorns to "snitch." Tunis thought a moment.

"Show me," he said, and his voice had in it that tone which made the foremast hands jump to obey when a squall was coming.

The boy got promptly off the wall.

"All right," he said gruffly. "But don't you tell her I showed you, Cap'n Tunis Latham."

"Trust me," agreed the captain of the *Seamew,* and followed after little John-Ed with such tremendous strides that the latter had to run to keep ahead of him.

Tunis was led to that point on the bluff from which a curl of smoke from the cabin chimney could be seen. He halted almost in horror—stricken to the heart when he understood.

"Alone?" he muttered.

"Yep," was the reply. "She's playing she's a castaway. Nobody but me knows it."

Then, fearing he had said too much, John-Ed ran away.

Tunis descended the bluff by a perilous path—he would not delay to go around by the cart track

—and came in plain view of the cabin. The door hinge had been repaired, and the door now swung freely. A strip of cotton cloth had been tacked over the gaping window. There was that neatness about the abandoned cabin which must always be associated in his mind with Sheila Macklin, even had he not seen her sitting pensively upon a driftwood timber by the door.

The ax had been doing good service, for there was a great heap of wood cut into stove lengths. The fragrant odor of something—chowder, perhaps—simmering on the stove, floated through the open door.

It was the coarse sand crunching under his boots which aroused her. She did not start at his approach, but raised her eyes languidly. He wondered if she had expected him. She must have seen the *Seamew* pass several hours earlier as they headed in toward the channel.

"My God, Sheila!" he exclaimed with bitterness, but without anger. "You can't stay here."

"I must—for a while. No. Don't talk about it, please, Tunis." Her gesture had a finality to it which silenced the objections rising to his lips. "Nothing you can say will change my determination. And you must not come here again."

"What will people say?" he gasped.

The violet eyes blazed suddenly while she surveyed him. This was not the girl he had known

before. At least, she was not the same as when he had seen her last. Even at that previous interview her look and manner had not so reminded him of the girl he had sat beside on the bench on Boston Common.

She was alone again. The flower of her nature that had expanded while she lived her all too brief and happy life with the Balls was now withered. She was hopeless again; she had become once more the Sheila Macklin that he had met under such wretched circumstances at that past time. But in spite of her helplessness and her wretchedness, there was something in the girl's expression which convinced Tunis Latham before he again spoke that nothing he could say would in any degree change her determination.

"That confounded girl never should have been allowed to come back to the house up there," he cried almost wildly. "Why did Elder Minnett want to interfere? It was not his business! No one need have known the truth."

"Don't you see, Tunis, that just because it was the truth it was sure to become known? At least, the main points in the whole matter were sure to come out. But if you are careful, if you are wise, nobody need know more of your share in the transaction than I have told already."

"Cap'n Ira asked me if it was true. He told me what you said. Sheila, you ruined your own repu-

tation with the old folks to save me. Girl——"

"Did I have any reputation to lose, Tunis?" she interrupted, yet speaking softly. "I could not save myself. I have tried to save you. Don't be ill-advised; don't be foolish. Say nothing, and it will all blow over—for you."

"You think I'll accept such a sacrifice on your part?" he demanded fiercely.

"I am making no sacrifice. Nothing I can do or say; nothing you can do or say; nothing anybody can do or say; will change my situation. We need not both be ruined in the eyes of the community. Soon I will get away. They will forget me. It will all blow over. You need not suffer."

"What do you think I am?" he cried again. "Am I the sort of a fellow, you think, to shelter myself behind you?"

"Shelter your Aunt Lucretia. Shelter your business prospects. Shelter the good name of your mother's son. You can do me absolutely no good by telling any different story from the one I was forced to tell. Let it be, Tunis."

She said it wearily. She dropped her eyes again, looking away from him. But when he would have stepped nearer and caught her to him, she leaped up and with look and tone warded him away.

"Don't touch me! Be at least so kind, Tunis. Make it no harder for me than you can help."

"You are breaking my heart, Sheila!"

"Mine is already broken," she told him. "And I do not blame you, Tunis. It is the punishment for my own sins. I attempted to escape from my overwhelming troubles in a wrong way. I see it now. I know it to be so. I must go somewhere else and build again—if I may. But never again upon a foundation of trickery and deceit. Oh! Never! Never!"

She stepped around the big block on which she had been sitting, entered the cabin, and closed the door behind her. She left him standing there hopeless, miserable, almost distraught by all the entanglements of this tragedy that had come upon them.

CHAPTER XXX

THE STORM

Captain Tunis Latham, pacing the deck of the *Seamew,* had come to a conclusion which was by no means complimentary to his own self-respect. During his manifold duties and the business bothers connected with the sailing of the undermanned schooner, his mind had seized upon and grappled with a train of ideas which brought him logically to the decision that he was playing a weak and piffling part.

Strong in most things, Tunis Latham had allowed his better sense to be throttled and his purpose balked in the thing which meant more to him than the schooner, his business success, or anything else in life. The broader the rift grew between Sheila and himself, the clearer he saw that without her he was a ship without a rudder and that nothing could come of his life save wreck and disaster.

She had renounced him for his own good, as she

believed, and he had tacitly consented to her ruling. He might be slow of thought regarding such things, but once having made up his mind—and it was made up now—he was of the kind that obstacles do not frighten.

Not only did he realize that by bowing to the girl's will he had been weak, but he was determined to take matters in the future into his own hands. He should not have allowed Sheila, in the first place, to shoulder the responsibility of handling the emergency of the appearance of the real Ida May Bostwick at Big Wreck Cove.

Sheila, in an attempt to save his reputation, to save his self-respect in the eyes of the home folks and of the world in general, had uttered a direct falsehood and cut herself off from him and from those who loved her. This was too much for any decent man to stand. Was he a coward? Would he shelter himself—as he had told her—behind her skirts?

Tunis believed that Cap'n Ira and Prudence, when once the shock of the girl's revelation was past, loved her so dearly that they would forgive Sheila if they knew all the truth—if they knew the girl as he knew her. He was not so sure of Aunt Lucretia. He had feared to tell her the night before that Sheila had gone to live in the old fisherman's cabin, in spite of the sympathy Lucretia had previously shown him. But he believed his silent

aunt fully appreciated the better qualities of the girl she had seen on but one occasion, and that she would, in time, admit that Sheila was more than worthy of her nephew's love.

In any event he had his own life to make or mar. Without Sheila he knew it would be utterly fruitless and without an object. Rather than lose Sheila he would sell the schooner, cut himself off from friends and home, and, with her, face the world anew. He was determined, if Sheila left Big Wreck Cove, that he would go with her. Nobody—not even the girl herself—could shake this determination now born in the mind of the captain of the *Seamew*.

Sheila had borne his reputation upon her heart from the beginning, but he should have at first thought of her good name and the opinion the world must needs hold of Sheila Macklin. She had been unfairly accused. She had been abused, ill-treated, punished for a sin which was not hers. It was not enough that he had tried to help her hide away from those who knew of her persecution. The only right thing to do—the only sane course, and the one which should have been pursued from the start—was to attempt to disprove the accusation under which the girl had suffered and set her right not only before Big Wreck Cove folk, but before the whole world.

The poignant feeling of sin committed, with which Sheila herself was now burdened, did not influence Tunis Latham. It was the logic of the idea which

convinced him that they had been totally wrong in what they had done. He should have married Sheila on the night they had met in Boston and set about first of all tracing back her trouble and disproving the flimsy evidence which must have convicted her of stealing from Hoskin & Marl's.

He told himself it was not piety, but hard common sense which suggested this as the only and practical way to handle the matter. It was, in truth, the awakened hope in a loving heart.

Tunis had been able to keep scarcely enough of his crew to handle the *Seamew* in fair weather; and the barometer was falling, with every indication in sea and sky of the approach of bad weather. He feared the few hands he had would desert when they reached Boston. Zebedee Pauling was a young host in himself—far and away a better seaman than Orion Latham, as well as a better fellow. But the schooner could not be sailed with good will.

Tunis' mind, however, remained fixed upon Sheila's troubles rather than upon his own; and as soon as the schooner docked, he went up into the town and wended his way directly to the great department store in which he had once interviewed the troublesome Ida May Bostwick.

The cargo was out, and the *Seamew* had already been warped into another wharf where freight was awaiting her when the skipper returned to the water

front that afternoon. The three men remaining of the forecastle crew were still at work, assisted by Zebedee and Horry Newbegin. They had not had a regular cook for two trips now.

But a new complication had arisen. Mason Chapin stood at the rail waiting his return, and a taxicab had been summoned. The mate carried a bag.

"A telegram from Doctor Norris. My wife's worse, Mr. Latham. I've got to go back just as fast as steam will get me there," was his greeting to the skipper of the *Seamew*.

This was according to the agreement Mason Chapin had made in the beginning. His wife was sorely ill, and surely Tunis would not stand between a man and his sick wife!

But it left a very serious situation upon the schooner when the mate drove away in the taxicab. Six men, forward and aft, to handle a suit of sails which equaled those of any seagoing racing yacht. If it had not been for the freight—some of which was perishable—the master of the *Seamew* would have laid up until he could have got together a more numerous crew at least.

But instead of going to the seamen's employment offices, Tunis had to turn to himself, while the heavier pieces of freight were lowered down the hatchway of the schooner. It was near evening when the hatch was battened down and a small tug

snaked them out of the dock and from among the greater shipping, and gave them a whistled blessing in midstream.

All hands and the skipper tailed on to the sheets and got her canvas spread. Then the skipper went below to the galley and prepared supper. Tunis Latham could be no stickler for quarter-deck etiquette on this voyage, that was sure.

But although the hands growled, and even Horry looked sour, Tunis seemed strangely excited; indeed, he looked less woebegone than he had for many a day. Something seemed to have given him a new zest in life. He even spoke to the hands cheerfully, and they were a trio of as surly dogs as ever quarreled with their food and a ship's officers.

"I'll lay up at the cove until I get a decent crew this time, if I lose all my existing contracts," Tunis said to Zebedee. "I'll find a bunch of men who are not afraid of their shadows. Huh! Hoodooed, is she? I'll show 'em that she can sail, even if Davy Jones himself sits on her bowsprit!"

There was wind enough, in all good conscience. They discovered that before they were out of the bay. It had shifted into the northeast, and the *Seamew* went roaring away on her course under reefed canvas, heeling over to it like a racing yacht.

But the long tacks to seaward which the gale enforced made it impossible for the schooner to beat back to Hollis where the first of her freight must

be discharged until after breakfast the next morning. By that time the three foremast hands who had been obliged to work double watches were fairly stewing in their own rage.

Tunis had to see his consignees while the freight was being discharged; when he got back to the wharf there was nobody aboard the schooner save Horry and Zebedee. The latter had a broken oar in his hand and he and the ancient seaman seemed to be in a condition of utter amazement.

"What's to do now?" demanded the skipper.

"They've gone, Cap'n Latham," stammered Zebedee. "Say they won't put foot on the *Seamew's* deck again. That—that confounded 'Rion——"

"What's the matter with Orion now?" exclaimed Tunis. "I hoped I was well rid of him. Has he turned up here at Hollis?"

"Look at this," said Zebedee, shaking the broken oar. "Here's what it seems 'Rion found in the hold two trips back. So those fellows say. He left it with 'em. And they say the schooner is a murder ship and they won't try to work her no further."

Tunis seized the piece of oar. Along one side was a streak of faint blue paint. He knew immediately where he had seen that broken oar before—leaning against the door frame of Pareta's cottage in Portygee Town, when he had last talked with the old man's daughter.

"What in thunder!"

He had turned it over and saw the straggling letters burned into the wood: MARLIN B. Newbegin looked at Tunis with an expression which betrayed a great perturbation of soul. The old man could scarcely show pallor under the mahogany of his face, but it was plain that superstition had him by the throat.

"So this is the thing that rotten 'Rion played them with, is it?" Tunis demanded. "Trying to make them think my beautiful *Seamew* was once the *Marlin B.?* Why, the poor fools, this broken oar came out of Mike Pareta's woodpile, or I'm a dogfish! See that blue streak? I saw this broken oar at Pareta's house. Bet you anything Eunez had something to do with it, too. Though why she should want to harm me, who never said a cross word to her, I can't see."

"She and your cousin are mighty thick," Zebedee said reflectively. "That's a fact."

"Thicker than they ought to be for the girl's good, I guess," agreed Tunis. Then he said to Horry: "What's the matter with you, old man? Do you want to desert me, too, all along of a broken oar with some silly letters burned into it?"

The ancient mariner had got a grip upon himself. The simple explanation that punctured the bubble of superstition so convincingly might not have altogether satisfied Horry. But he was a true and just man.

"I never deserted your father, Cap'n Randall Latham, not even when his ship sunk under him," the old man declared. "I was saved from that wreck by chance, not because I tried to be. And I ain't likely to desert his son."

"How about you, Zebedee?" demanded the captain of the *Seamew*.

"I am not afraid of any foolish talk, anyway, Captain Latham. Had I been I wouldn't have applied for the berth. I had heard enough about it. Eunez Pareta, I believe, talked too much to the Portygees, and that is why you couldn't keep them. But I'm not a Portygee."

"I'll say you're not," agreed Tunis. "But we're left in something of a fix. This freight for Josh Jones and his father is needed. Some other stuff consigned to Big Wreck Cove ought to be there by to-night. And I can't get a man for love or money here to help us out. I tried while I was uptown."

Zeb showed no hesitation. He shrugged his blue-jerseyed shoulders.

"Don't you cal'late we can beat down there under a reefed mainsail and jib? It'll take time, but she's the sweetest sailing craft I was ever in in my life," he said.

"She's certainly all right, 'cept for that pull to sta'bbo'd," muttered Horry.

"Humph! Three men to sail a schooner of this tonnage. And this isn't any capsize wind at that,"

murmured the captain of the *Seamew*. "But it's got to be done. Come! Will you risk it with me?"

They looked aloft and then at each other. There was little save reflection in their several glances. Men of this caliber do not hesitate over a risk of life or ship. Cautious as Tunis Latham was, his agreement with those he had contracted with called for a prompt fulfillment of the details of the pact. Nor did the prospect of the rising gale and rising sea cause any of the trio to blanch. It was not a long run to Big Wreck Cove. Properly manned, the *Seamew* should make it prettily in three or four hours. In addition, there was little but an open roadstead before the port of Hollis. The breakwater was scarcely strong enough to fend off the waves in a real gale. And they knew that a gale was coming.

This was no place for a schooner of the *Seamew's* size to ride out the storm. She might easily drag her anchors and go ashore on the Hollis sands that in the past had buried many a good ship. So the trio of Cape men nodded grimly to each other and took the better chance.

CHAPTER XXXI

BITTER WATERS

Ah, yes! youth, and romance linked with a self-scrutiny born of her New England ancestry if not of her father's Celtic blood, had brought Sheila Macklin to her dreadful pass. One might have said, if one were hardened enough, that had the young woman "possessed an ounce of sense" she would not have made herself penniless, an outcast, and so suffered because she could not escape quickly from an environment well-nigh poignant enough to turn her brain.

She was days in recovering from the shock of the appearance of the real Ida May Bostwick at the Ball homestead. And those hours of torture that had followed had eaten like acid into Sheila's soul.

She had by no means recovered herself when Tunis had his brief interview with her. Had she not shut herself away from him—refused to even discuss the situation with the troubled skipper of

the *Seamew*—she must have broken down, given way to that womanly weakness born of love for the man of her choice.

For Sheila knew how Tunis Latham suffered. She felt that her course was right; nevertheless she fully appreciated how keen the blow of her decision fell upon the partner in her sin.

A sin it was—almost, it seemed to her now, an unpardonable crime. To seize upon another girl's identity; to usurp another's chance; to foist herself upon the unsuspecting and kindly souls at the Ball homestead in a way that raised for them a happiness that was merely a phantom—the thought of it all was now a draught of which the dregs were very, very bitter.

Over and over again she recalled all that Ida May Bostwick had said to and of her. It was all true! Coarse and unfeeling as the shopgirl was, Sheila lashed her troubled soul with the thought that what Ida May had said was deserved. Neither circumstances nor the fact that Tunis had suggested the masquerade excused the transgression.

The days of her waiting on fate, alone in the cabin under Wreckers' Head, gave no surcease to her mental castigation. Her sin loomed the more huge as the hours dragged their slow length by.

And yet, with it all, Sheila's keenest anguish came through her renunciation of Tunis' love. She could see no possible way of holding to that if she

would purge herself of the fault she had committed.

And above the stain of her false position since she had come to the Cape was the overcloud of that accusation which had first warped Sheila Macklin's life and humbled her spirit. She believed that she could never escape the shame of that prosecution and punishment for a crime she had not committed.

She believed that, no matter where she might go nor how blamelessly she might live, the fact that she had been sentenced to a woman's reformatory would crop up like the ugly memory of a horrid dream to embitter her existence. Was her life linked with Tunis Latham's, he must suffer also from that misfortune.

And so Sheila Macklin waited from hour to hour, from day to day, dully and in a brooding spirit, for release from a situation which must in time embitter her whole nature.

From the cabin at the foot of the seaward bluff of Wreckers' Head, the coming of the black gale out of the northeast was watched anxiously by Sheila, from the very break of this day. Tunis might be on the sea. She doubted if the threat of bad weather would hold the *Seamew* in port.

There was no rain—just a wind which tore across the waste of waters within view of her station, scattering their crests in foam and spoondrift, and rolling them in huger and still huger breakers on

the strand. It was a magnificent sight, but a terrifying one as well. The girl watched almost continually for a white patch against the black of the storm which might mark a sailing craft in peril.

Steam vessels went past, several of them. They, surely, were in little danger, were their hulls ordinarily sound and their engines perfect. All the fishing craft had made for cover the night before. The New York-Boston steamers would keep to the inside passage in this gale.

Sheila had made all taut and trim inside the cabin. She had plenty of firewood and sufficient provisions to last her for a time.

About noon she heard the crunch of footsteps on the sand. It was little John-Ed who first appeared before her eyes. He thrust a letter into Sheila's hand.

"Dad brought it up from the port this morning, and I got it away from him. Say," he continued, evidently much disturbed, "he's coming here."

"Who is coming here—your father?"

"No, no! Not dad. I—I couldn't help it. I didn't tell him. I said you wanted to play alone here at being shipwrecked, and I was just like you said—your man Friday."

"Who do you mean?" asked Sheila, greatly agitated. "Not——"

"I bet 'twas that Tunis Latham told him you was here," continued John-Ed. "Anyway, don't blame

me. All I done was to help him down the path."

He disappeared. Sheila stepped to the door. Cap'n Ira was laboring over the sands toward the cabin, leaning on his cane, his coat flapping in the wind and his cap screwed on so tightly that a hurricane could not possibly have blown it away.

But in addition and aside from the buffeting he had suffered from the wind, the old man looked much less trim and taut than Sheila had ever before seen him. He had not been shaved for at least three days; a button hung by a thread upon his coat; there was a coffee stain on the bosom of his shirt.

He looked so miserable, and so faint, and so buffeted about, that the girl cried out, running from the door of the cabin to meet him. The sweat of his hard effort stood on his brow, and he panted for breath.

"I swan! Ida May—er—well, whoever you be, gal, let me set down! I'm near spent, and that's a fact."

"Oh, Cap'n Ball, you should not have done this!" cried the girl, letting him lean upon her and aiding him as rapidly as possible to the cabin door. "You should not have done this. You—you can do nothing for me. You can do no good by coming here."

"Humph! P'r'aps not. Mebbe you're right. Let me set down on that box, gal," he muttered.

He eased himself down upon the rough seat against the wall. He removed the cap with an

effort and took his huge handkerchief from its crown. He mopped his brow and face and finally heaved a huge sigh.

"I swan! That was a pull," he said. "So you're settled here. Gone to housekeeping on your own hook, have ye?" he said.

"Just for a little while, Cap'n Ira. Only—only until I can get away. I—I have been expecting some money—payment of one of my father's old bills."

She slit the envelope of the letter little John-Ed had just brought her. Inside was a pale-blue slip—a money order.

"Yes," she said. "I can get away now. I must go somewhere to earn my living, and as far away from here as I can get."

"So you think on traveling, do you?" said the old man. "You ain't content with Big Wreck Cove and the Head?"

"Oh, Cap'n Ira!" she cried. "You know I can't stay here. Winter is coming. Besides, the people here——"

"Ain't none of 'em asked ye to come an' live with them?"

"Cap'n Ball!"

"Ain't ye seen Tunis?"

The girl hid her face from him. She put her hands over her eyes. Her shoulders shook with

her sobbing. Cap'n Ira took a reflective pinch of snuff.

"I cal'late," he said, after wiping his eyes, "that it ain't Tunis' fault that you are going away any more than it is mine and Prudence's. You just made up your mind to go."

"Cap'n Ball!" she exclaimed faintly, and again raised her eyes to his. "Can—can I help it? *Now?*"

"I don't know," he said, pursing his lips. "I don't know, gal, as anybody is driving you away from Wreckers' Head and them that loves ye here."

She was speechless. She gazed at him with drenched eyes, her face quivering uncontrollably. A hand pressed tightly to her breast seemed endeavoring to still the wild fluttering there.

"I don't know," he repeated, "that we got much to offer a gal like you, and that's a fact. We learned to know you pretty well while you stayed with us, Prue and me did. Somehow, we can't just seem to get the straight of what you told us that night you left. It—it ain't possible that you made some mistake, is it? Mebbe you was talking about some other gal?"

"Oh, Cap'n Ball!" she sighed. "I am able to tell you nothing that will change your opinion of me."

"Well, I don't know. I don't know. What you did say," he observed in that same reflective, gentle tone, "didn't seem to change our opinion much. Not mine and Prudence's."

"Cap'n Ball!"

"No," he went on, wagging his head. "You committing such a fault as you say you was accused of, and you coming down here as you did, through a trick—somehow those facts, if they be facts, don't seem to have much effect on our opinion. Me and the old woman feel that somehow—we don't know how—what you told us that night and what you done for us before that night don't fit together nohow."

She stared at him without understanding. He cleared his throat and mopped his brow again with the big silk handkerchief.

"No, gal, we can't understand how anybody as good and loving as you have been to us can be at heart as bad as—as other folks might try to make out. Fact is, we know you can't be bad."

"What—what do you mean, Cap'n Ball?" she asked faintly.

"I swan! I tell ye what I'm getting at," burst out the old man. "We want you to come back. Prudence, she wants you to come back. I swan! I want you to come back. Why, even that dratted Queen of Sheby needs you, Ida May—or, whatever your name is! We've got to have you!

"Prudence can't scurcely get around the house. And that niece of hers sits there like a stick or a stun, not willin' to scurce lift her hand to help. Thank the Lord *she's* goin' home to-day. Her visit's

come to an end. She don't like it down here. She says we're all a set of—er—hicks, I believe she calls us.

"Howsomever, we're all high and dry on the reefs, gal, and it seems likely you're the only one can get us off. You ain't got to go away from here, if you don't want to. I've made it pretty average plain to that Bostwick gal that no matter what happens, she's got no expectations as far as Prudence and me are concerned. It was money and nothing but money she was after. Her being Prudence's niece in kind of a far-fetched way don't make it our duty—not even our Christian duty, as Elder Minnett calls it—to keep a gal in the house that we don't want, nor yet die at her convenience and leave her our money. And so I'll tell the elder if he undertakes to put his spoon in the dish again."

Sheila was listening to words that she had never expected to hear from the old captain. Could this be true? Were Cap'n Ira and Prudence, in spite of what they knew about her—what she had told them and Ida May had told them—desirous of having her back? Was there a chance, no matter what the real Ida May Bostwick could say, for Sheila to return and take up her peaceful life with the Balls?

Could this be real? Indeed, was it right for her to do this? Tunis——

She arose and walked to the open door, looking

out almost blindly at first upon the gale-smitten sea. It was like her heart—so tossed about and fretted by winds of opinion. What should she do? Which way should she turn? Not to save Sheila Macklin from trouble or disgrace. Not even to save Tunis from possible scorn. The question that assailed her now was only: *Was it right?*

Suddenly, out upon the mountainous waves, she spied a sail. It was reefed, flattened down, almost tri-cornered. The two sticks of the schooner and the jaunty bowsprit pointing skyward heaved again into view. She stood so long gazing at the craft that Cap'n Ira spoke again.

"What d'ye say, gal?" he asked anxiously.

"Look—look here, Cap'n Ira!" she exclaimed. "Can it be the *Seamew?* Is she trying to head in for the channel? Oh! Are they in danger out there?"

The old man rose with his usual difficulty and hobbled to the door, leaning on his cane. He peered out over her shoulder, and his keen and experienced eyes saw and identified the laboring vessel almost at once.

"I swan! That is the *Seamew,* Ida May," he exclaimed. "Tut, tut! What's Tunis got himself into such a pickle for? 'Tain't reasonable he should —being as good a seaman as he is.

"My, my! Why don't he get some cloth on her? He can't have lost all his upper canvas. Don't he

know he needs tops'ls to beat up aslant of this gale and get into the shelter of the Head? I swan! If there's men enough there to man her proper, why don't they do the right thing?"

"Oh, Cap'n Ball," gasped the girl, "perhaps there are not enough men with him. Perhaps his crew has deserted again."

"I swan!" rejoined the old man. "What did he set sail for, then? Ain't he got a mite of sense? But, I tell ye, Ida May, if he don't get more canvas on her, and get under better way, he'll never make that channel in this world."

"Oh!"

"The schooner's sure to go on the outer reef. She never can claw off the land now. Without help —if that's his trouble—Tunis Latham will never get that schooner into Big Wreck Cove. And God help him and them that's with him!" added the captain reverently.

CHAPTER XXXII

A GIRL TO THE RESCUE

On shore the gale seemed a stiff and dangerous blow. At sea, even with a stanch deck under one's feet, the wind proved to have passed the hurricane mark long since. The captain of the *Seamew* felt that the elements had conspired bitterly to assail his schooner. Before they were a mile beyond the end of the Hollis breakwater, Tunis knew that he had the fight of his seagoing experience on his hands.

When they were fairly out of the semi-shelter of the point behind which Hollis lay, Tunis and his two companions realized very quickly just what they had to contend with. They had spread a handbreadth of mainsail, but the jib was blown out of the boltropes by one big swoop of wind and carried down to leeward, looking like a giant's shirt.

"Still feel that tug to sta'bbo'd," grumbled Horry. "Just like——"

"Belay that!" commanded Tunis. "I begin to

believe that's bad luck, anyway. If you hadn't got on to that tack when we first put the schooner into commission, those Portygees wouldn't have even remembered the *Marlin B.* And *that* schooner thousands of miles away from these seas!"

"I cal'late 'Rion Latham would have found something else to harp on then," said Zebedee. "He was bound to ruin you if he could."

Quickly the gale increased instead of abating, and it was utterly impossible for the trio to get topsails on her. She needed the pull of upper canvas if she was to tack properly for the mouth of the channel into Big Wreck Cove.

They fought for two hours to bring this much-desired object to pass, hoping for a lull or a shifting of the gale which might aid them. The yellow sands of Wreckers' Head were plainly in view all that time. To give up the attempt and run before the gale was a folly of which Tunis Latham had no intention of being guilty if it could possibly be avoided. Manned as she was, the schooner might never be worked back to a landfall if they did so.

The keen old eyes of Horace Newbegin first spied the thing which promised hope. From his station at the wheel he shouted something which the younger men did not catch, but his pointing arm drew their gaze shoreward.

Coming out from the Head was an open boat. Four figures pulled at the oars while another held

the steering sweep. The daring crew was heading the boat straight on for the pitching schooner!

"The coast guard!" the old man was now heard to shout. "God bless them fellers!"

But Tunis knew it was not the lifeboat from the distant station. He knew the boat, if he could not at first identify those who manned it. It was an old lifeboat that had been stored in a shed below John-Ed Williams' place, and these men attempting their rescue were some of the neighbors from Wreckers' Head.

They came on steadily, the steersman standing at his post and handling the long oar as though it was a feather's weight. His huge figure soon identified him. It was Captain John Dunn, who, like Ira Ball, had left the sea, and he had left his right forearm, too, because of some accident somewhere on the other side of the globe. But with the steel hook screwed to its stump and the good hand remaining to him, Captain Dunn handled that steering oar with more skill than most other men with two good hands could have done.

How the four at the oars pulled the heavy boat! Tunis sought to identify them as well. He saw John-Ed Williams—in a place at last where he was forced to keep up his end, though he was notably a lazy man. Ben Brewster had the oar directly behind John-Ed.

The third figure Tunis could not identify—not

at once. The man at the bow oar was Marvin Pike, who pulled a splendid stroke. So did that unknown oarsman. They were all bravely tugging at the heavy oars. Tunis had faith in them.

Zebedee suddenly plunged across the pitching deck and reached the rail where Tunis stood. Discipline—at least seagoing etiquette—had been somewhat in abeyance aboard the *Seamew* during the last few hours. Zeb caught the skipper by the arm.

"See her?" he bawled into the ear of the surprised Tunis.

"What's that?"

"See her hair? It's a girl! As I'm a living sinner, it's a girl! Pulling number three oar, Captain Latham! Did you ever?"

Clinging to a stay, the captain of the *Seamew* flung himself far over the rail as the schooner chanced to roll. He could look down into the approaching lifeboat. He saw the loosened, dark locks of the girl who was pulling at number three oar. On the very heels of Zeb's words the captain was confident of the girl's identity.

"Sheila!"

His voice could not have reached her ear because of the rush and roar of the wind and sea, but, as though in answer to his shout, the girl glanced back and up, over her shoulder. For a moment Tunis got a flash of the face he so dearly loved.

What a woman she was! She lacked no more in

courage than she did in beauty and sweetness of disposition. What other girl along all this coast—even one born of the Cape strain—would have dared take an oar in that lifeboat in face of such dire peril as this?

"Good Lord, Cap'n Latham!" shrieked Zeb. "That's Miss Bostwick!"

Tunis straightened up, squared his shoulders, and looked at Zebedee proudly. He wanted Zeb to know—he wanted the whole world to know, if he could spread the news abroad—that the girl pulling number three oar was the girl he loved, and was going to marry!

An hour later the *Seamew,* her topsails drawing full and her lower canvas properly handled, drove on like the bird she was through the channel into the cove, trailing the old lifeboat behind her. The skipper had taken the wheel himself, but that "tug to sta'bbo'd" did not disturb his equanimity as it sometimes did Horry's.

Sheila, muffled in oilskins and sea boots, but with her wet hair flowing over her shoulders, stood beside the skipper. No matter how satisfied and confident Tunis might appear, the girl was still in an uncertain state of mind.

"And so," she said to him anxiously, "I do not know what to tell them. Cap'n Ira seemed so poorly

and so unhappy. And he says Aunt Prue is almost ill.

"But it was Cap'n Ira who told me what to do when we saw the *Seamew* in danger; how to get the men together and how to launch the boat! Oh, it was wonderful! He was not too overcome to be practical and realize your need, Tunis."

"Trust Cap'n Ira," agreed the young man. "And what other girl could have done what you did, Sheila? Hear what Cap'n John Dunn says? You ought to be a sailor's daughter. *I* can tell him you are going to be a sailor's wife."

"No, no! Oh, Tunis! It can't——"

"No 'can't' in the dictionary," interrupted the captain of the *Seamew*. "You and I are going to have one big talk, Sheila, after I take you up home."

"Up home?" she repeated.

"You are going back to Cap'n Ira's. You know you are. That other girl has beat it for Boston, you say, and there's not a living reason why you shouldn't return to the Balls. Besides, they need you. I could see that with half an eye when I went away the other morning. The old man hobbling around the barn trying to catch an old hen was a sight to make the angels weep."

"Poor, poor Cap'n Ira!" she murmured.

"And poor Aunt Prudence—and poor *me!*" exclaimed Tunis. "What do you think is going to

happen to me? If you go away, I shall have to sell all I own in the world and follow you."

"Tunis!" she cried, almost in fear. "You wouldn't."

"I certainly would. I am going to have you, one way or another. Nobody else shall get you, Sheila. And you can't go far enough or fast enough to lose me."

"Don't!" she said faintly. "You cannot be in earnest. Do you know what it means if you and I have any association whatsoever? Oh! I thought this was all over—that you would not tear open the wound——"

"I don't mean to hurt you, Sheila," he said softly. But he was smiling. "I have got something to tell you that will, I believe, put an entirely different complexion on your affairs."

"What—what can you mean?" she burst out. "Oh, tell me!"

"I'll tell you a little of it now. Just enough to keep you from thinking I am crazy. The rest I will not tell you save in the Balls' sitting room before Cap'n Ira and Aunt Prue."

"Tunis!" she murmured with clasped hands.

"Yesterday I spent two hours in the manager's office of Hoskin & Marl's. They have been looking for you for more than six months. Naturally, there was no record of you after you left that—that school when your time was out. They didn't seem

to guess you'd have got work in that Seller's place."

"What do you mean? What did they want me for?" gasped the girl.

"Near as I could find out from the old gentleman who seemed to be in charge there at the store, they wanted to find you to beg your pardon. He cried, that manager did. He broke down and cried like a baby—especially after I had told him a few things that had happened to you, and some things that might have happened if you hadn't found such good friends in Cap'n Ira and Prudence. That's right. He was all broke up."

The girl stood before him, straight as a reed. She rocked with the pitching of the schooner, but it seemed as though her feet were glued to the planks. She could not have fallen!

"They—they know——"

"They know they sent to jail the wrong girl. The woman that stole the goods is dead, and before she died she wrote 'em all about it from the sanitarium where the firm sent her. They are sending you papers signed by the judge, the prosecuting attorney, even the pawnbroker and the store detective, and—and a lot of other folks. Why, Sheila, you are fully exonerated."

She began suddenly to weep, the great tears raining down her face, although she still stood erect and kept her gaze fixed upon him.

"Six months! As long as I have been down here!

Oh, Tunis! While we were making up our plot on that bench on Boston Common and planning to lie to these dear, good people down here—and everybody; while we were beginning this coil of deceit and trouble, I might have gone back there to the store and found all this out. And—and I would never have needed to lie and deceive as I have done."

"Huh! Yes. I cal'late that's so, Sheila," he said. "But how about me? Where would I have come in, if you had found out that your name had been cleared and Hoskin & Marl were anxious to do well by you? Seems to me, Sheila, there must be some compensation in that thought. There is for me, at any rate."

She flashed him a look then that cleaved its way to Tunis Latham's very soul. His tale did not remove from her heart all its burden. She was still penitent for the falsehood she had told in direct words to Cap'n Ira and Prudence about her first meeting with Tunis. But that prevarication, at least, had been for no purpose of self gain.

And so Sheila looked at her lover for just that passing moment with all the passion which filled her heart for him. Had Tunis not been steering the *Seamew* through a pretty tortuous channel at just that moment there is no knowing what he would have done—spurred by Sheila's look!

CHAPTER XXXIII

A HAVEN OF REST

WRECKERS' HEAD so shelters the cove from the northeast that the schooner could be brought safely in to Luiz Wharf, instead of dropping her anchor in deep water. Half the port, and all of Portygee Town, crowded nearby wharves and streets to welcome Tunis Latham's schooner; for news of her peril and the way in which help had reached the *Seamew* had come down from the Head as on the wings of the wind itself.

There was one face on the wharf Tunis Latham sought out with grim persistency as the schooner was made fast. He had purposely placed Sheila in Zebedee Pauling's care. Tunis kept, directly under his hand, the broken oar which had helped to make so much of his recent trouble. When the *Seamew* was safe, her skipper leaped ashore. And he carried the broken oar with him.

Orion, grinning and sneering by turns, saw his

cousin coming. It must have been preternatural sagacity which caused him to see and recognize the broken oar. Having seen it, he jumped for the head of the wharf.

Tunis leaped away on his cousin's trail. The crowd parted to let them through, and then joined in a streaming, excited tail to their kite of progress. Most of the spectators lived in Portygee Town. Some of them had been members of the *Seamew's* deserting crews. They were afraid of Tunis Latham, but they had little sympathy for Orion.

The skipper caught up with him in the middle of the road and almost opposite the Pareta cottage. Orion had picked up a cobblestone as he reached the street and, finding himself about to be overtaken, he turned and threw the missile at Tunis' head. The latter dodged it and, with a single, savage blow of the oar felled his cousin to the roadway.

"You unmitigated scoundrel!" Tunis roared. "I ought to take your life. Because of you I nearly lost my own to-day—and the lives of two other men and my schooner into the bargain. You villain!"

As Orion tried to scramble up, the skipper of the *Seamew* made another pass at him with the oar, and the fellow fell again.

"Don't hit me! Don't hit me again, Tunis! Remember I'm your cousin. I—I haven't done a thing —true an' honest, I haven't!"

The listeners gathered closer. Tunis Latham's

face displayed such rage that the Portygees expected him to continue his attack with the oar. But instead he shook it before their eyes—and Orion's.

"See it?" he demanded of the bystanders. "That's the scurvy trick the dog played me. Found this broken oar in somebody's woodpile, burned the name of the *Marlin B.* into the handle, and foisted it on a fool crew to prove that my schooner was once called by that name. I ought to pound him to death!"

Suddenly a brilliant figure whirled into the midst of the crowd and reached the angry skipper and his victim. Eunez, her black eyes ablaze, her face ruddy with anger, planted herself before Tunis Latham, hands on hips, confronting him boldly. One glance at the prostrate Orion assured her that, although there was blood upon his face, he was not much hurt. She tossed her head and snapped her fingers under the nose of the captain of the *Seamew.*

"So now, Tunis Latham! It is that you have waked up! Of a gr-r-reat smartness are you, eh?" she cried. "You scorn us all, and tr-r-reat us as you would dogs. Heh! All you shipmasters are alike.

"But *you*—we put the laugh on you, eh? That oar in your hand—ha, ha! Do not lay the blame altogether upon your cousin. *I* burned those letters into that wood with my curling irons. Fooled by a girl, eh, Tunis Latham? Ah! Learn your lesson,

Captain Latham! We Portygee women are not to be scorned by *any* schooner captain. No!"

She snapped her fingers again in his face and turned away, swaying her hips and tossing her head as she disappeared into her father's cottage. When Tunis looked around for his cousin, he found that that facile young man, taking advantage of the girl's intervention, had slipped away.

A winter hurricane had pounced upon the Cape and torn at it with teeth and claws, as though seeking to dismember it—to wrench the forty-mile curved claw of the Cape from the remainder of Barnstable County.

The driven snow masked everything—earth, houses, trees, and the shivering bushes; it clung to these objects, iced upon them like frosting. No craft ventured out of Big Wreck Cove, least of all the *Seamew,* although she had a cargo in her hold and a complete and satisfied crew in her forecastle.

Tunis Latham was speaking of the latter fact to Aunt Lucretia in the warm and homelike kitchen of Latham's Folly.

"Zeb is a good fellow. He has got together a bunch of hands that aren't afraid of ghosts or bogies. You couldn't make those Portygees or some of the other hands we had see the ridiculousness of their fear of the *Seamew*—bless her! But with this

bunch Zeb has got together I wouldn't fear to sail around the Horn."

His aunt looked startled at the suggestion and shook her head.

"I know you wouldn't want I should go for such a long voyage, Aunt Lucretia," he replied. "And I don't want to myself. But I couldn't be content here if I didn't see the prospect bright before me of getting Ida—I mean, of getting Sheila."

His aunt looked at him again not unkindly, but said not a word.

"I've told you all about it, Aunt Lucretia," the skipper of the *Seamew* pursued. "Everything. If Sheila did wrong to come down here as she did, I did a greater wrong in encouraging her to come and in tempting her with the chance of escaping from the mess she was in. And she's paid—we've both paid—for our folly.

"As for folks talking, if that Bostwick girl wants to keep her job with Hoskin & Marl's she'll keep her mouth shut about Sheila. She understands that. And Hoskin & Marl—everybody, in fact that was connected with that awful thing that happened to Sheila—have done all in their power to make amends."

For the first time his aunt's lips opened.

"The poor child!" she said.

"I want more than your sympathy for Sheila, auntie," he urged earnestly. "I want your approval

of what Sheila and I mean to do—in time. Of course, I must be better established first and be making money enough to support a—a family. And Sheila would not think of leaving the old people up there. They need her so sorely.

"But you may as well know, first as last, Aunt Lucretia, that I mean to marry Sheila. I know it was wrong in me to try to palm her off on you as somebody she wasn't—to try to fool you——"

"You did not fool me, Tunis; not for a moment," she told him softly.

He stared at her in amazement.

"No," went on his usually inarticulate aunt. "The moment I first looked into her face I knew she was not Sarah Honey's daughter. That baby's eyes were brown when Sarah brought her here years ago; and no brown eyes could change to such a beautiful violet-blue as—as Sheila's. I knew you and she were trying to deceive me, but I could not help loving the dear girl from my first sight of her."

That was a very long speech indeed for Aunt Lucretia to make. She put her arms about Tunis Latham's neck and said all the rest she might have said in a loving kiss.

Driving as the storm was, there remained something that took the skipper of the *Seamew* out into the welter of it. With the wet snow plastering his back he climbed out of the saucerlike valley to the rear premises of the Ball place. He even gave a

look in at the barn to make sure that all the chores were done for the night. The gray ghost of the Queen of Sheba's face was raised a moment from her manger while she looked at him inquiringly, blowing softly through her nostrils the while.

"You're all right, anyway," said Tunis, chuckling as he closed the barn door. "You've got a friend for life."

He went on to the kitchen door. Inside he could hear the bustle of Sheila's swift feet, the croon of Prudence's gentle voice, and then a mighty "A-choon!" as Cap'n Ira relieved his pent-up feelings.

"Don't let them fish cakes burn, gal," the old man drawled. "If Tunis ain't here mighty quick he can eat his cold. Oh! Here he is—right to the nick o' time, like the second mate's watch comin' to breakfast."

Tunis had shaken his peacoat free of the clinging snow and now stamped his sea-boots on the rug. He smiled broadly and confidently at Sheila and she returned it so happily that her whole face seemed to irradiate sunshine. Prudence nudged Cap'n Ira's elbow.

"Ain't it a pretty sight, Ira?" she whispered.

"She looks 'most as sweet as you did, Prue, when I took you to the altar," sighed the old man windily. "I swan! Women is most alike, young an' old.

All but that dratted Ida May Bostwick. *She* was a caution to cats."

"Now you hush, Ira. She's our own rel'tive and we ought not to speak ill of her."

"Ha!" blew Cap'n Ira, reminding Tunis of the old mare when she snorted. "Ha! Maybe she is. But even so I want none o' her. An' I told Elder Minnett so. I got kinder of an idee that the elder won't be so brash, puttin' his spoon into other folks' porridge again."

"Hush, Ira! Don't be irreverent. Remember he's a minister."

"So he is. So he is," concluded Cap'n Ira. "They say charity covers a multitude of sins; and I expect the call to be a preacher covers a multitude of sinners." He chuckled mellowly again. "But sometimes I've thought that the 'call' some of our preachers hear 'stead o' being the voice of God is some other noise they mistook for it. Well, there, Prudence, I won't say no more. But you must allow that Elder Minnett's buttin' in, as the boys say, come pretty nigh bustin' everything to flinders.

"Come, Tunis. Do sit down or that gal won't be able to dish up supper, and I'm as hungry as a wolf. Pull up your chair, Prudence. Ain't this livin', I want to know?" He shuddered luxuriously at the howl and rattle of the wind without. "Now, folks: 'For that with which we are about to be blessed make us truly thankful. Amen.' Put your

teeth in one o' them biscuit, Tunis. I want to recommend 'em to you. Ain't none better on this endurin' Cape—no, sir. We got the best cook on the Head. If you are ever lucky enough to get one ha'f as good, Tunis——"

"Now, you be still, Ira," admonished Prudence, smiling comfortingly at the blushing girl.

"You better sing small, Cap'n Ira," said the skipper of the *Seamew* hoarsely. "It's mebbe just because we're good-natured and forbearing that you are keeping your cook for a while."

"Ha! So that's the way the wind blows, eh?" croaked Cap'n Ira. "You talk big, young man. But we know Sheila better than you do, p'r'aps. Don't we, Prue?"

His little old wife, with her winter-apple face wrinkled in a smile of utter confidence, leaned nearer Sheila to pat her hand. The girl seized the wrinkled claw suddenly and pressed it with both of hers—pressed it gratefully and with a full-charged heart.

"Don't be disturbed. Don't fear," she whispered so that the old woman only might not hear. "I will not leave you."

The two men looked deeply into each other's eyes and with a great understanding. They are not demonstrative, these Cape men, not as a rule; but Cap'n Ira and Tunis Latham understood all entailed in that promise so softly given, and they subscribed to it. Sheila was to have her way.

Hours later Tunis lit the lamp in his bedroom and then stood before his window, gazing out into the driving snow. Almost immediately he saw the gleam of another lamp, far up the slope, showing from that north window of Sheila's chamber in the old Ball house.

This was the signal they had agreed upon—their good-night symbol whenever he was at home. He stood there a long time, looking out.

Although the wintry wind raved across Wreckers' Head and the snow scurried wildly before it, there was springtime in the hearts of Tunis Latham and Sheila—the springtime of their hopes.

THE END

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